



**United Nations  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

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**UNECA North Africa Office**

**Sustainable development in North Africa: experiences and lessons**

Ad Hoc Experts Group Meeting  
18-21 November 2007, Tunis

**Aide mémoire  
October 2007**

## Context

The ministerial declaration resulting from the July 2007 meeting of the ECOSOC (the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations) stresses the importance to pursue the globalisation process in an equitable manner and the need for making sure that growth results in a reduction of poverty. The signatories pledge to place productive employment and decent work as a central objective of their national and international policies. They call on a reduction in urban poverty and ask the United Nations and the other relevant organizations to contribute to and support these efforts. They affirm their commitment to give priority for the eradication of hunger and malnutrition in all countries and agree to take measures to improve the access to food.

The international community is conscious of the narrow overlap between economic growth to fight poverty and the respect of environment. The threat of climatic change and the loss of biodiversity are regarded today as the two greatest environmental challenges of humanity.<sup>1</sup> In their last April 2007 conference, the African Ministers for Finances, Planning and Economic Development asked their governments to adapt their national development strategies in order to face climatic change problems.<sup>2</sup> The call highlights the urgency of the problems raised by sustainable environment in general and climatic change in particular to Africa's development.

In North Africa, several countries have set up sustainable development policies or national strategies but their impact remains unequal from one sector to another and from one country to another. In addition, progress needs to be made in systematically using monitoring and evaluation of development projects and making sure that the necessary statistics and indicators are available.<sup>3</sup> The Millennium Development Goals indicators for sustainable environment are encouraging for energy effectiveness (approximately 170 kg in oil equivalent by \$ of GDP against an average of 220 for developing countries and of 360 for Sub-Saharan Africa), access to drinking water (nearly 90% of the population against less than 60% for Sub-Saharan Africa and less than 80% for developing countries), access to adequate sanitary facilities (nearly 90% of the population against less than 60% for Sub-Saharan Africa and less than 80% for developing countries).<sup>4</sup>

However, several challenges remain to be faced. With an increasing urbanization, more than 20 million people live in shantytowns. North Africa, is the region with smallest forested areas in the world (1% of the surfaces, against 29% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 50% in Latin America, moreover the use of wood as principal source of energy remain too high). Less than 5% areas are protected, against 11% in Sub-Saharan and 16% in Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, "Elevating Climate Change And Biodiversity To The Top Of The Political Agenda", 13 April 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Quarantième session de la Commission Economique des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique, Déclaration de la Conférence des ministres africains des finances, de la planification et du développement économique, Addis-Abeba , 2-3 avril 2007.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Environment statistics workshop, July 2007.

National Councils for Sustainable Development in Africa: A Review of Institutions and their Functioning, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, "The Millennium Development Goals Report", 2005. Dans ce rapport, l'Afrique du Nord regroupe le Maroc, l'Algérie, le Maroc, l'Algérie, la Tunisie, la Libye et l'Egypte.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, "The Millennium Development Goals Report", op cit.

The region suffers from a growing lack of water and much remains to be done in improving the management of this resource.<sup>6</sup> It is expected that the already fragile availabilities of water in North Africa drop significantly in the ten to twenty next years because of climatic change.<sup>7</sup> The threat of desertification is increasingly present and largely harms several socio-economic groups.

A better control of energy issues, the management of oil revenue and the relationship between energy and development also continues to make debate.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, these indicators show strong disparities between countries and indicate that rural areas are far behind cities.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, the region remains marked by an acceleration of economic growth rates which do not generate sufficient job opportunities to stop unemployment. The problem of education, the adequacy between training and employment and the lack of capacity building initiatives are among the unresolved issues of the region.<sup>10</sup> Whereas several sectors experience an unprecedented development (oil, construction, tourism, infrastructures, etc) the relation between economic growth, social development and environmental protection are not yet insufficiently studied.<sup>11</sup>

These questions are articulated around the economic, social and environmental components of sustainable development to which is added the issue of governance and the institutions required to successfully implement human development policies. According to the Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable development is *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. This ambitious objective implies a consistency, at the national and international levels, of public policies in the three economic, environmental and social fields. All the difficulty of the question of sustainable development, but also all its interest, lies indeed in the reconciliation of the multiple objectives which these three fields cover. An appropriate approach of sustainable development consequently supposes to be interested in the choice of these objectives, their hierarchisation, their consistency and finally with the determination of indicators making it possible to evaluate public policies through a sustainable development framework.

The Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) resulted in a plan of action embodied in the JPOI (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation), which aims to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21. The JPOI focuses on the reduction of poverty, protection of natural resources through improved patterns of consumption and production and that attention should be given to vulnerable populations and women in this process. The international community is invited to take all measures necessary to achieve these goals, through an approach which takes into account the interaction between social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development, which relies on regional and international collaboration.

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<sup>6</sup> Commission Economique des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique, Bureau Afrique du Nord, "Eau et environnement en Afrique du Nord: politiques et strategies" 2006, et The World Bank, "Making the Most of Scarcity: accountability for better water management results in the Middle East and North Africa", 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Agoumi, "Vulnérabilité des pays du Maghreb face aux changements climatiques", Institut international du développement durable, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Commission Economique des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique, "Les Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement en Afrique: Progrès Accomplis et Défis à Relever", Août 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Commission Economique des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique, "Les Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement en Afrique: Progrès Accomplis et Défis à Relever", Août 2005.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa "Africa's Sustainable Development Bulletin: Capacity Building for Sustainable Development", 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Commission Economique des Nations Unies pour l'Afrique, "Colloque internationale: Enjeux économiques, sociaux et environnementaux de la libéralisation commerciale des pays du Maghreb et du Proche-Orient", Octobre 2007. Organisation Mondiale du Tourisme, Séminaire sur le Développement Durable du Tourisme et la Réduction de la Pauvreté, Tanger, 5 - 7 juillet 2006.

North Africa is firmly enshrined in the process. Several countries have explicitly included these guidelines in their national sustainable development plans and coordinate their efforts in regional and international forums for monitoring Johannesburg mainly through:

(a) a forum held in 2003 in preparation for the 12th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and

(b) the preparation of reports and workshops on the options available to Member States:

- cope with the challenges of water and reform of environmental policies in preparation for the 13th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development held in 2005, and
- preparing the 14th and 15th sessions of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development on energy policies, air pollution and industrial development.

Several deadlines, in particular the summit in Bali on Climate Change scheduled for December 2007, call for a redoubling of efforts and increased coordination of efforts of African countries so that the specific needs of the region are better taken into account. In the United Nations Millennium Development Goals declaration, member states agree that a sustainable environment means using natural resources intelligently and protecting the complex ecosystems on which the survival of humanity depends.

Since its 2006 repositioning, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) increasingly concentrates its activities around the promotion of regional integration and the response to the specific needs and the global challenges of the African continent. In this context, sustainable development plays a central role. Indeed, four concepts are inherent in the concept of sustainable development:

1. the concept of needs, and more particularly the basic needs of the most vulnerable populations,
2. the constraints posed by resources and technologies as well as complex social organisations to all stakeholders in the sustainable development process in order to meet the needs of current and future populations,
3. the strong interdependence of the economic, social and environmental spheres of sustainable development, and
4. the fact that sustainable development cannot be undertaken without taking account of the place of each country in its regional and international environment; cooperation between countries and regional integration are pre-requisites to the success of any national strategy of development.

The seminar on sustainable development in North Africa organized by UNECA's North Africa Office takes place in a context where UNECA is actively involved in the preparation of Bali. Climate change is considered as a priority issue<sup>12</sup> and the Conference of African Ministers of Finance to be held in April 2008 on the 50th anniversary of UNECA will show that all actions of the Commission must continue to strive to ensure that economic growth in the African continent is rooted in a sustainable development perspective.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Discours de M. Abdoulie Janneh, Sous secrétaire Général des Nations Unies et Secrétaire Exécutif de la CEA, atelier sur la stratégie régionale d'adaptation aux changements climatiques en Afrique, CEA, 16-20 Avril 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Rencontre de M. Abdoulie Janneh, Sous secrétaire Général des Nations Unies et Secrétaire Exécutif de la CEA avec M. Joseph Stiglitz prix Nobel de l'économie, 19 septembre 2007.

## **Objectives**

The North Africa Bureau of ECA is holding with its partners an ad hoc experts group meeting intended to recapitulate sustainable development experiences of its seven member states (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia) and draw lessons that could provide guidance for the definition of sustainable development strategies for the region.

The meeting focuses on the characteristics of each of the facets of sustainable development and highlights the interaction between the three economic, social and environmental spheres of sustainable development. The welfare of humans being the ultimate goal of this interaction, the meeting gives a particular importance to human development and the governance of policies and programs aimed at this objective.

The results of the meeting will be issued in a publication intended to provide a description and guidance for sustainable development strategies in North Africa.

## **Organisation**

The meeting starts with a plenary intended to highlight the sustainable development challenges faced by the region and to give the tone of the seminar. Subsequent sessions will follow to focus on:

1. Economic growth, natural resources, biodiversity and climatic change: this session is an opportunity to discuss the linkages between economic growth, natural resources and biodiversity, to identify the fields for which more thorough analysis and research are necessary to answer the problems arising from climatic change and to agree on how economic growth in North Africa can answer in a more constant way the social aspirations of the populations in a framework of optimal management of natural resources and biodiversity.
2. Governance and human development: this session aims at identifying the governance issues underlying the success of development and to agree about the means to implement so that governance can rely on the adequate skills, structures and information.

## **Participants**

The Office for North Africa of ECA covers Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. The meeting will gather experts having knowledge and expertise in one or more fields of sustainable development in North Africa. Participants will represent governments of the seven member states, the private sector, academia, NGOs and the civil society and various agencies of the United Nations.

## **Partners**

Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (Tunisia)  
Sahara and Sahel Observatory

## **Dates and venue**

The meeting will take place in Tunis from 18 to 21 November 2007.

## **Contacts**

Additional information can be obtained from:

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