

Water and Climate Change from a Policy Perspective

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When analyzing the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and more specifically the water related SDG6¹ and its interlinkages with the other SDG goals, it become clear that no national, regional, or international policy can solve the increased vulnerability of water resources in face of climate change by adopting just a narrow sectoral approach. Also, beside the SDGs, policies working in silos can not solve water scarcity in a remote area, as an example, without mainstreaming two other important international frameworks that are the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction. In my opinion, the United Nation although in good fate, did the mistake of not harmonizing the three international frameworks in a comprehensive an “user friendly” format so that financing, implementation, and reporting should be less overwhelming for the parties that ratified all 3 agreements. Under the 3 UN frameworks, countries have the “obligation” to continuously monitor and evaluate the impact of their policies and actions, so they can address any challenges and adjust their actions accordingly. To further clarify my point about harmonization concerns and more specifically the need for accurate, greed, and coordinated reporting indicators within the Paris Agreement Enhanced Transparency Framework (Art. 13)², I think developing countries in our Arab region will continue to struggle in finding their way to acquire sufficient financial resources and technical expertise in case this coordination is missing. Resilient infrastructures to bring potable water and access to sanitation and hygiene to the vulnerable populations will not be on the rendezvous!



Today, if countries are to elaborate and implement sustainable strategies to preserve the well decreasing water superficial and ground water resources, it is crucial that synergies and horizontal coordination among the various stakeholders is ensured. Efficient coordination among line ministries is with no doubt key to deliver the needed services to vulnerable populations. However, a new challenge seems to be worth to consider. It is what we call the vertical integration of the Paris agreement's National Determined Contributions (NDC), and the related National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). Indeed, if countries have managed until now to deploy territorial policies to implement SDG related projects, this unfortunately does not apply to the other two UN frameworks (PA and SFDRR). These two mechanisms have demonstrated either their limitation in terms of local vision and in terms of proper implication of local stakeholders and population for their implementation. Before analyzing this important challenge, I should underline that since the ratification of the Paris Agreement in which 191 Parties out of 197 Parties to the United Nation Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) are Parties to the Paris Agreement, more than 93% of the submitted NDCs mentioned water as a priority for their adaptation policies. Water is seen as a major issue by most of the countries in a context of climate change. Droughts, flooding, rise of the sea level, degradation of the water quality, biodiversity degradation, are some of the issues to fix. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)³ in its « Climate Change and Water » technical paper VI, confirmed by observational records and climate projections that freshwater resources are vulnerable and have the potential to be strongly impacted by climate change, with wide-ranging consequences for human societies and ecosystems. However, and as indicated, without a clear technical and political will for a vertical integration of the projects related to NDC or NAP implementation, the results will be far from realistic and the claimed targets and objectives will not be achieved. So how could a country integrate national water climate policies within a local context? For that, we should remind ourselves that the Paris Agreement recognizes in its Preamble the importance of the engagements of all levels of government in the elaboration and deployment of parties NDCs. To understand further this vertical integration point, I invite the reader to read an in-depth policy brief about this approach in a paper published very recently (May 2021) by the « Collaborative Climate Action »⁴. The authors of the paper, suggest that NDCs localization could be based on three elements:

- 1- the involvement of subnational governments by the national government early in the process of NDC elaboration
- 2- During the implementation of NDCs, a large part of the work needs to take place at subnational level, and
- 3- Advocacy and positive interplay through cooperation across levels of government

Finally, for the NDC's vertical integration to be effective till the end of the process or at least by the next revision round in 2025, it is imperative that joint efforts for data sharing and collection be supported so national and local capacities to assess NDC progress are strengthened.

As a refresher, for a quite long-time water was not considered as a serious topic in the International Climate Negotiations until the organization of the COP22 in Marrakech⁵ in November 2016 where the voice for water and climate was echoed loudly during the Water Action Day. During that historic Conference of Parties, collaborative action of COP21 and COP22 Presidencies (France and Morocco) along with members of the global water community has enabled COP 22 to become a landmark in the history of the UN Climate Conference, making Water much more visible within the Climate debate.



Since that time progress have been made on the international scene but there are still some gray zones to tackle. One of them is related to the concrete implementation of Article 7 of the Paris agreement⁶. Which aims at strengthening the global climate change response by increasing the ability of all to adapt to adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience. It defines a **Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)**, the goal is to enhance adaptive capacity and resilience; to reduce vulnerability, with a view to contributing to sustainable development; and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the goal of holding average global warming well below 2 °C and pursuing efforts to hold it below 1.5 °C. So, the GGA and its connection with the water sector article 7.1 of the PA state that while implementing GGA contributions to SDG's and ensuring adequate adaptation response is also necessary. Countries' must then strengthen efforts to respond to climate change, making the most of co-benefits and synergistic action in line with the aim of achieving the temperature goal of the agreement. On the other hand, article 7 of the PA mandates that Parties engage in domestic adaptation planning processes, including formulating and implementing National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), assessing climate change impacts and vulnerability, and 'monitoring and evaluating and learning' from their NAPs (Article 7.9). For instance, from my own experience, and through several discussions at several webinars it appears that some countries are still not well prepared to report on the progress made either in terms of policies and or projects related to water adaptation to climate change. It appears also that mitigation-adaptation synergies in some countries submitted proposals either within GCFs Readiness⁷ of PPF⁸ windows, are still required to aspire for GCF funding.

The year 2020 has been the year of spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Its fallout significantly influenced the ability of countries to plan for, finance and implement adaptation actions in response to current and future climate impacts, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable countries and population groups⁹.

Opportunities to help secure climate finance to overcome identified gaps in the highly vulnerable water sector do exist and they need to be seized. Several actions need to be considered. They are related to governance; Policy; Institutional and human developments. Concretely speaking, I think climate finance can be dealt with either at the Arab region macro-scale, and at the same time by down scaling to the national and subnational levels based on specific and/ or tailored approaches at the various levels. These actions are:

- Pro-active implication of the private sector in financing the water sector;
- Support projects considered at the interface between mitigation and adaptation,
- Align projects with national priorities that are coherent with sustainable development.
- Encourage cross -sectoral water benefits;
- Double counting of water projects without explicit climate objectives should be avoided;
- Mainstream ambitious, water resilient programs in Arab country NDCs while promoting synergies of water climate adaptation in the NDCs, NAPs and the SDGs;
- Establish multi and bilateral dialogues in some hydrographic basins, in order to identify common water related challenges and opportunities for collaboration between neighbor countries; and
- promoting expertise and knowledge exchange related to water infrastructures withing our Arab region.

Perhaps another promising opportunity to further secure climate finance for the water sector could be the use of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement¹⁰ generally referred to as the « markets article ». To make it simple this article is supposed to clarify the rules on how countries can reduce their emissions using international carbon markets. Although it is one of the least accessible and complex concepts of the global agreement that was left unresolved after successive COPs since 2015, I believe negotiators are in their way to draft a close to final resolution to be approved in Glasgow.



With more than 400 ppm CO_2 concentration in our atmosphere, which according to the IPCC latest observations³ is resulting into an average global temperature to around 1°C , I consider the next COP in Glasgow as a last chance for all Arab Countries to put more pressure on developed countries to stick to their financial pledges so climate finance flows more towards the Arab region and be more focused on the issues related to water vulnerabilities. President-Designate Alok Sharma in a major speech at Whitelee Windfarm, near Glasgow, said « *This year's climate summit COP26 will be the world's best chance of building a cleaner, greener future - COP26* »¹¹.



The science is clearly demonstrating every day that we must urgently enhance action to respond to the threat of climate change to have a chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees, and to adapt effectively and increase our resilience. This is why, the four COP 26 UK Presidency key messages in Glasgow¹² are: 1) finalize the Paris Rulebook and resolving issues with transparency; 2) boosting all forms of finance public and private; 3) help protect communities and habitats; 4) to keep 1.5°C in reach. In this regard, Arab state parties to the UNFCCC and to the PA should not only manage to attend COP26 and raise their voices loudly in Glasgow, but at the same time create an enabling environment in which political, institutional, technological, and social transformation can take place in their respective countries for the benefit of the Arab people.



To conclude this short paper, I suggest that independent experts and stakeholders in the Arab region gather to develop an inclusive **Arab Partnership for Water Climate Resilience**. The central objective of this Arab independent dialogue platform should be to develop a comprehensive stakeholder owned Arab agreement on this crucial issue. Specific objectives could be facilitating effective engagement of stakeholders in Arab countries to actively contribute to building human capacities, and to increase awareness about water resources vulnerabilities in face of climate negative impacts, and build momentum towards the subsequent implementation of an agreed action plan that will include leveraging the climate finance in the water sector in our region.

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