



## Policy Recommendations Brief

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Financing Our Sustainable Future Roundtable Series:

# Maximising Arab Youth Engagement in Sustainability and Climate Action

April 2023

# INTRODUCTION

The World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Risks Report has emphasised that over the next decade, the main calamities that humanity will have to bear the burden of are climate-related, or rather result from a failure in taking appropriate climate action<sup>1</sup>. Recognising that climate change is a transboundary issue, global efforts towards sustainability have emerged to curb the looming consequences of inaction. While this push is an international movement, certain regions are required to act hastily as the impacts of climate change are much more pressing due to geographical, geopolitical, and socioeconomic factors. One such region is the Arab World – notorious for a water-scarce desert landscape and intricate complexities in its socioeconomic and political landscape that puts a population of almost half a billion individuals<sup>2</sup> at elevated risk of food and water insecurity, mass migration, and increased frequency of disease amongst many others. Thus, regional leaders sought to strengthen and reinforce the role and presence of sustainability to ensure a viable future for upcoming generations – as Arab youth will be upcoming "borrowers" of the region, whether it be flourishing and opportune or devastated by non-fulfilment and non-commitment.



There has been a rapidly growing interest in sustainability and climate action across the Arab World in the past few years. From several nations announcing their net-zero strategies and developing the pathways to reach those ambitions, to the region witnessing the presence of two consecutive Conference of the Parties (COPs) in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, respectively, there has been a fundamental shift in the demand for the integration of sustainability as a necessity as opposed to a luxury. In line with meeting climate ambition and achieving necessary targets and goals, many nations have also begun transforming their economies – opting for greener, more environmental and climate-friendly means of operations across several sectors such as energy, transport, retail, industry, and more. Not only does this transition allow nations to reduce their carbon footprints, but it also leads to the creation of millions of jobs and opportunities for the region and significantly drives the growth of the local economy with green industries forecasted to surpass \$10 trillion by 2050<sup>3</sup>.

Even though the region's crisis requires youth engagement and proactivity, the region's youth seem less interested in contributing in a meaningful way towards sustainability and climate change when compared to their global counterparts. This is mainly because Arab youth priorities are focused on several different factors that currently pose a more direct and evident threat to their daily lives and livelihoods. The 2022 Arab Youth Survey portrayed that Arab youth are more concerned with factors such as:



- Unemployment



- Rising costs of living and hyperinflation in the region



- Increased debt



- Addressing concerns over safety and security



- The quality of provided services such as healthcare and education

1. World Economic Forum. (2023). 'Global Risks Report 2023'. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2023/>

2. The World Bank Data. (2022). 'Population, total - Arab World'. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL7?locations=IA>

3. Portala, J. (January 10, 2023). 'Green industries could be worth \$10.3 trln to economy by 2050 - study'. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/business/sustainable-business/green-industries-could-be-worth-103-trln-economy-by-2050-study-2023-01-10/>



# ROUNDTABLE KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

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As for the discussion points on the current state of sustainability and how integrated it is into the daily lives of Arab youth, the roundtable discussion showed that the most pertinent challenges preventing its complete 'acceptance' include:

## 1. Lack of proper education and a general census on the definition of sustainability.

As shown in the word cloud above, there is a broad sense of what sustainability stands for – and even more, there is a lack of awareness and education dedicated to teaching students fundamental concepts in sustainability. Opportunities for upskilling and green skills are also not widely taught or addressed during the conventional K-12 and higher education academic journeys.

## 2. Strengthened correlation between environmental protection and preservation and what 'sustainability' means.

Participants highlighted that most of their personal education or familiarity with sustainability revolves more so around environmental health and similar parameters – such as waste management, water conservation, and energy saving – as opposed to recognising the need for virtually all sectors within the regional economy to possess some features related to sustainability – from a social and governance aspect as well.

## 3. Cultural barriers that make sustainability more challenging to achieve

Many culturally observed phenomena in the Arab World – such as the importance of 'generosity' or 'hospitality' in the Arab culture often lead Arab youth to excessively consume goods and services without fully being aware of the degree of their overconsumption and its adverse impacts on the environment. Another important factor is the preference of citizens from particular Arab States to lead a rather luxurious life which naturally leads to further spending and eventually to consumerism.

## 4. The need for the extra effort to introduce sustainability into one's life

Comfort and convenience were consistently discussed as major obstacles as Arab youth have developed habits of comfort and convenience that have become a norm in their daily lives. For instance – depending on supermarkets to supply free single-use plastic bags as opposed to having to remember to bring a reusable back to the grocery store or opting to pay a higher fee to purchase a new one.

## 5. A lack of support or incentives from the government to facilitate sustainability uptake

The Arab World lacks a concrete framework specific to sustainability – including both policies that require abidance from citizens to avoid a fine, or the possibility of a grant or incentive from the government when opting to support a sustainable cause. Some nations also lack a strategy that engages youth such as programmes or workshops tailored to the needs and demands of the youth in the region.

## 6. Sustainability goals seem either too far-fetched or out of touch with youth

Most sustainability goals in the region, and globally, focus on target achievement in 2050 if not later. To the youth – these targets seem discouraging as they are in a 'distant future', eliminating a sense of urgency for climate action. Additionally, many available solutions seem to disincentivise them as there seems to be a lack of trust between youth consumers and sustainability-focused, eco-friendly brands. For instance, disposing of trash in recycling bins is futile if the infrastructure in a certain region does not allow recycling, thus discouraging youth from taking part in recycling.



# POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

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Understanding the challenges then allowed youth participants to provide solutions by proposing policy-oriented recommendations to various policy and decision-makers in the region that they believe would support them and their counterparts in adopting sustainability such as:

## 1. Educating youth from an early age

It is important to intercept the education journey as early as the K-12 academic years to build and establish sustainable habits from a younger age such that sustainability becomes a "second language" or second nature to Arab youth.

## 2. Strengthen the relationship and awareness between sustainability and the allocation of an income

Since Arab youth are mainly concerned with securing employment opportunities, it is important to create awareness campaigns and upskilling workshops that align with green and sustainable opportunities – further establishing a bond between sustainability and livelihood and encouraging youth to resort to the green economy and adopting green skills to obtain green jobs.

## 3. Developing rigid policies with adequate incentives and penalties for non-compliance

Creating undisputable policies would highly encourage youth to comply and start adopting sustainability practices into their daily lives – such as the ban on single-use plastics in Abu Dhabi prompted youth to consistently rely on reusable bags. Additionally, grants and incentives on sustainable products, and creating policies that cap the costs of these products – from tax cuts and subsidies on electric vehicles and individual solar panel installations to price caps on reusable bags and bottles.

## 4. Create a competitive and gamified process that engages youth in sustainable causes

Similar to the Dubai Fitness Challenge 30x30, creating campaigns that boost competitiveness to an already keen young audience would boost engagement and activity in sustainability and climate action. For instance, developing an app – or endorsing the use of an app – that tracks the quantity of waste produced or the number of carbon emissions released through daily activities allows app users to compete and eventually build sustainable habits.

## 5. Create a calendar or annual theme dedicated to youth

Similar to the UAE's annual theme initiative (for instance the 'Year of Sustainability' or the 'Year of Tolerance'), annual themes could be developed across the region that promote and encourage youth engagement. The theme would spark youth and public interest and raise awareness on certain focus areas about youth (for instance Year of Youth Climate Action, or Year of Youth Supporting Biodiversity). The annual theme would be associated with an annual calendar that shows opportunities and events for youth engagement by both the public and private sectors which provides youth with a platform to participate in a meaningful yet enjoyable way.

This document has been prepared by Posterity Institute as the knowledge partner for the Arab Youth Council for Climate Change.

Posterity Institute is a think tank based in the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates that focuses on fostering partnerships between the public and private sectors through designing initiatives that drive sustainability, enabling the regional climate-tech ecosystem, and creating a hub for ground-breaking research in economic inclusion, climate change, and leveraging technology for intergenerational wellbeing, the Institute's three core pillars.