

Arab Group Submission on the Global Dialogues of the MWP

September 2024

Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the Arab group, welcomes the opportunity to provide views on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges, and barriers relevant to the topic of “Cities: Urban Systems”.

Principles

The MWP shall continue to be conducted in a manner consistent with the principles set out in Decision 4/CMA.4, which decides that the outcomes of the work programme will be “**non-prescriptive, non-punitive, facilitative, respectful of national sovereignty and national circumstances, take into account the nationally determined nature of nationally determined contributions and will not impose new targets or goals**”. Taking fully into account the principles of **Equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities** of the Convention and its Paris Agreement.

It is important to reiterate that the MWP is operationalized through focused exchanges of views, information, and ideas within a specific scope that includes **all sectors** (Decision 4/CMA.4 paragraph 4). So far, the MWP dialogues have covered a range of topics from just energy transitions, transportation, buildings and currently urban systems. This inclusive approach ensures a comprehensive coverage of significant yet under-explored topics and ensures equal progress across the board. **With that said, we are concerned that this approach is being jeopardized as we continue to see topics related to energy transitions emerge as subtopics noting that this topic has been the focus of the first year.**

Moreover, we remain concerned that the mandate of the MWP is being challenged. The MWP is not set up to implement or follow up on the mitigation component of the GST, as this would create a prescriptive process which contradicts the non-prescriptive nature of this work program as well as the bottom-up, nationally determined nature of NDCs. The MWP is currently fulfilling its mandate effectively, including by encouraging sharing best practices, increasing capacity building, addressing barriers and challenges as well as unlocking finance through the IFEs. This positive progress should not be jeopardized by changing the mandate.

Sustainable Development

The mitigation work program’s objective is best achieved when the discussion is situated within the broader context of sustainable development and balanced climate action, **recognizing equity, different national circumstances, different responsibilities between developed and developing countries, and the urgent need for developed countries to take the lead in climate action due to their historical responsibility and to achieve a fair distribution of the carbon budget.** The IPCC AR6 report states: “climate change mitigation action designed and conducted in the context of sustainable development, equity, and poverty eradication, will be more acceptable, durable and effective”. As such, we emphasize exchanges based on comprehensive approaches that integrate mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable development so as to achieve effective results.

Cities and urban systems are at the core of human life, so their development must account for all dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental in a balanced and

integrated manner. For example, improving existing and new infrastructure to build resilience in cities and settlements while addressing climate objectives contributes to SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 13 on climate action, respectively. Further, the development of cities goes hand in hand with economic growth, job creation and the development of local expertise; this addresses SDG 8 regarding decent work and economic growth as well as SDG 4 on quality education. Strategically planned urban systems will improve people's access to public services thereby addressing SDG 1 regarding no poverty and SDG 10 regarding reduced inequalities.

Recognizing that developing countries' priorities are uniquely shaped by their circumstances and competing priorities, contextualizing the dialogue within the different SDGs becomes increasingly important. Specifically, developing countries face an additional burden due to fiscal constraints, weak institutional capacity, and resource scarcity, among others. These challenges largely influence their ability to implement ambitious mitigation actions. Therefore, a comprehensive and holistic approach can maximize positive synergies and reduce trade-offs across the SDGs, enabling an exchange of views on how cities and urban systems can be catalysts for ambitious and inclusive climate action.

Note on the sub-topics suggested by the co-chairs:

With regards to the suggested subtopic *"electrification and switching to net-zero emission resources"*

1. We express concern about the repeated focus on themes that were thoroughly explored during the first year of the Mitigation Work Program (MWP). This subtopic falls under the broader category of energy transitions, which has already been discussed. Revisiting this topic undermines the mandate which calls for *"successive dialogues to cover different topics"* and detracts from the opportunity to cover important unexplored topics. Electrification has been a recurring subject in all dialogues thus far, particularly in the first and second Global Dialogue in 2023 (just energy transitions and transport), as well as the third Global Dialogue in 2024 (buildings).
2. Additionally, it is not in line with the expectation that the subtopics should be presented neutrally, as it shows a clear preference/bias toward for electrification, denoting other important technologies as secondary.
3. **The concept of "switching to net-zero emissions resources" is flawed and misleading.** Resources can refer to finance and technology, either way they must be inclusive. In addition, resources and sources are often confused. However, we would like to clarify that we should be referring to **technologies, not sources**. According to the IPCC, Net-zero refers to balancing the amount of emissions in the atmosphere with the amount removed. It is used to describe pathways, goals, and processes rather than resources. Net-zero is **not an inherent quality of a resource** or even a process, rather it is a quality that can be achieved through the modification of a process. Therefore, resources cannot be deemed net-zero, since resources are evaluated by considering a **lifecycle assessment** and the net emissions of their lifecycles. Achieving net-zero requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach that addresses emissions reduction in energy, industry, transport, agriculture, and waste management while also relying heavily on

carbon capture utilization and storage technologies and natural gas. Several **clean and low-emission** technologies **contribute to net-zero**, including renewables, electrification, hydrogen nuclear and CCS/CCU and others. Effective policies and enhanced international cooperation are also critical to enabling the shift towards a net-zero world.

With regards to subtopic “*Low-carbon infrastructure*”

1. We must ensure that we are not moving backwards and duplicating discussions from the second global dialogue on transport¹ and the third global dialogue on buildings.² It is imperative to make progress across different themes to ensure that we are not deviating from the mandate.

Therefore, to limit duplication of work and to ensure we are truly non-prescriptive, facilitative, and respectful of different national circumstances, the Arab Group suggests focusing on novel and inclusive subtopics for this upcoming dialogue.

Spatial planning and low-carbon infrastructure:

a) Urban planning, design, and land use

It is critical to ensure that sustainable urban planning and design create urban environments that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially equitable. Options in urban planning include the following:

- *Mixed-use developments*: encouraging mixed-use spaces that combine residential, commercial, and recreational uses to reduce travel distances and foster community interactions.
- *Context specific neighborhood designs*: that support the use of design principles drawn from local heritage and locally sourced materials.
- *Walkable urban forms*: creating safe, accessible and efficient routes for pedestrians within the design of emerging cities, taking into account that the many cities have extremely high temperatures and spread-out landscapes, walkability becomes a challenge. For example, innovative solutions can include the utilization of shaded areas, whether through trees or built structures. Another example is the use of water sprays as an effective method for cooling in waiting areas and along pedestrian lanes.

Challenges:

- *Climate change-related events*: Their frequency and severity exacerbate challenges, particularly in vulnerable urban areas, which undoubtedly impact future urban plans. In many cases, developing nations may need to prioritize building adaptive capacity to withstand immediate climate impacts, such as sandstorms or floods, over long-term mitigation strategies. For example, in Arab countries, which suffer from water scarcity, governments may prioritize securing water supplies through

¹ Second global dialogue and investment-focused event, <https://unfccc.int/event/second-global-dialogue-and-the-second-investment-focused-event-under-the-sharm-el-sheikh-mitigation>

² Third global dialogue and investment-focused event, <https://unfccc.int/event/third-global-dialogue-and-investment-focused-event-under-the-sharm-el-sheikh-mitigation-ambition-and>

infrastructure projects like desalination plants to ensure public health and economic stability over investing in new low-carbon infrastructure.

b) Low-carbon infrastructure

Before discussing low-carbon infrastructure or decarbonizing existing systems, we must acknowledge the reality that developing countries face pressing infrastructure needs. As their populations grow and economies rise from poverty, the demand for essential infrastructure—transportation, energy, housing and public services—intensifies. These countries are often still in the process of building the critical infrastructure required to support economic development and improve living standards. Balancing this urgent need for expansion with emissions reductions poses a unique challenge. **Addressing these needs does not stop at the mere recognition of the principles of equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), rather the MWP should work to operationalize these principles.** In this context, spatial planning can be a powerful tool to guide sustainable infrastructure development, but it must accommodate both immediate development needs and long-term mitigation objectives. Hence, we should promote infrastructure that is adaptable, ensuring that developing countries have the capacity to build and grow while also addressing climate action. **This is in accordance with objectives of the Convention and its Paris Agreement, addressing climate action is to be carried out in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.** This will require coordinated efforts at national and local levels, international cooperation, and the sharing of technical expertise.

- **Waste management:**

With that said, as urban areas continue to expand and populations grow, the volume of waste generated increases, making effective waste management a critical component of sustainable urban development. Waste management plays a crucial role in climate change mitigation by directly emissions and enhancing efficiency. Properly addressing waste, including food waste, through reduction, recycling, and treatment can significantly cut methane emissions from landfills. Implementing best practices for waste management solutions can effectively mitigate these emissions and support circularity principles.

Challenges:

- Low-carbon infrastructure typically relies on advanced technologies that may not be readily available or affordable in developing countries, and transferring such technologies requires financial support, partnerships, training, and local capacity building.

Circular Carbon Economy

Circularity has become a pillar of sustainable practices, and the circular carbon economy is a comprehensive approach that addresses the heart of the climate change issue. The circular carbon economy is a holistic approach that is concerned with a management of emissions through reduction,

reuse, recycling, and removal. Urban systems can be retrofitted and built around a CCE approach. Such strategy would target all aspects of an urban system while achieving sustainable development

- **Reducing** emissions through integrating abatement technologies in processing facilities in cities, and improving the efficiency of energy, etc.
- **Reusing** liquefied CO₂ can be utilized in desalination, dry ice, and food packaging.
- **Recycling** converting captured carbon into valuable products such as carbon cured concrete, offers the twin benefit of mitigating climate change and generating economically viable product and other chemicals.
- **Removing** CO₂ from the atmosphere through integrating both nature-based solutions and innovative technologies in urban planning and retrofitting existing infrastructure. Examples include utilizing open spaces for the installation of DAC and deploying CCUS technologies at scale in urban systems. CDR is integral towards a net-zero world; according to the IPCC, “CDR is required to achieve global and national targets of net zero CO₂ and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions” and CCS is part of all modelled scenarios that limit global warming to 2° or lower by 2100.

Enhance carbon storage through green and blue infrastructure

The findings of AR6 WGI and WGII have underscored the importance of urban green and blue infrastructure for reducing the total warming in urban areas due to its local cooling effect and potential to mitigate climate change through storing carbon. The IPCC’s WGIII AR6 describes that “in some contexts, high-density areas that lack adequate provision of green and open spaces may intensify the UHI [Urban Heat Island Effect].” Green spaces not only act as carbon sinks but also “provide adaptation co-benefits by mitigating the UHI effect” (IPCC WGIII AR6). These include parks and recreational areas, tree planting, urban agriculture, green roofs and walls. Other important areas of discussion within

- *Urban Forests*: delivers cost-effective mitigation and adaptation strategies that entails reforestation, afforestation and land conservation. As a region with diverse landscapes, preserving existing natural carbon sinks and introducing new ones is essential in urban planning to reduce emissions and heat, provide shade, and preserve biodiversity. Tree planting and peri-urban forestry contributes to ecosystem restoration and helps halt and reserve the biodiversity loss while also play a crucial role in carbon sequestration.
- *Coastal protection*: Coastal urban systems could benefit greatly from implementing nature-based solutions like mangroves, reefs, wetlands, seagrass, and more which act as other natural carbon sinks while achieving adaptation co-benefits such as reducing flooding risks.
- *Blue-Green Infrastructure (BGI)*: This describes an “interconnected network of natural and designed landscape components, including water bodies and green and open spaces, which provide multiple functions” which include building resilience while yielding mitigation co-benefits. Emerging cities can integrate this concept into the design of their urban systems at different scales. BGI simultaneously addresses floods, drought, reducing UHI, and leveraging natural carbon sinks.

Challenges

- **Food security** is a major challenge in the Arab region due to many factors including: limited arable land, increased water scarcity, and concurrently increasing demand for food production. As populations grow, there is greater pressure to utilize available land for agricultural purposes. This prioritization of land for food production competes directly with urban greening projects, which also require significant space. Furthermore, the conversion of land for urban uses such as housing or commercial development can further strain the availability of land for urban greening. **Water scarcity** is also one of the most pressing challenges in the Arab region. With extremely low rainfall and depleting freshwater resources, the allocation of water for urban greening or blue carbon ecosystems becomes challenging, especially as desertification worsens. Drought conditions and limited access to water can lead to poor plant survival rates, further complicating efforts to improve urban environments.
- The competing demands for land and water underscore the complexity of balancing food and water security with sustainable urban development and environmental conservation efforts.

Cross-cutting theme: Capacity building, finance, and technology

The role of access to financial and technological resources and the engagement of communities cannot be overlooked. Enabling societies in developing countries is of utmost importance to ensure that those responsible for developing urban strategies, designing buildings, and engineering small-scale and city-scale solutions are equipped with the necessary expertise and the means to fulfill their duties. Building capacity in developing nations will enable the implementation of urban strategies while also building resilience. Examples areas of exchange:

- Expanding and developing the technical expertise to carry out assessments for existing urban systems and models for the region's sustainable urban development plans.
- Increasing access to funding and support from developed countries and international climate finance mechanisms and grants for sustainable urban projects in developing countries and ensuring that financial support and investments are equitably distributed.
- Supporting the engagement of developing countries in international fora to enhance international cooperation and knowledge exchange related to sustainable urban development strategies.
- Promoting sustainable lifestyle behaviors in communities through awareness campaigns and implementing relevant initiatives.

Challenges

- *Limited capacity to address relevant research gaps* in developing countries further complicates the process of implementing effective mitigation solutions that respond to the region's circumstances, priorities and needs. According to the IPCC WGIII AR6, some of the key knowledge gaps include "urban-enabling environments; the role of smaller settlements, low-income communities, and informal settlements". These fundamental gaps need to be bridged to support developing countries in their pursuit of sustainable urban development.

Organizational Elements

The global dialogue (GD) and investment-focused event (IFE) organized under the MWP have not only played a role in fostering the exchange of views, but also in fostering valuable collaboration among stakeholders. These events have facilitated the alignment of the diverse interests, promoted the sharing of innovative solutions, and accelerated the identification of opportunities challenges and how to overcome them. However, there are aspects that warrant consideration to better improve the organizational matters to better improve and enhance their effectiveness along the lines of COP28 decision paragraph 10. The following suggestions are proposed:

- 1. Inclusive Participation:** developing countries have been inadequately represented and outnumbered by developed countries. It is important to promote more inclusive participation by facilitating and encouraging balanced participation. To address this, it is crucial to ensure that the co-chairs are committed to inclusivity from the outset. This can be achieved by:
 - Ensure that the panels or key speakers represent the geographical, cultural, and sectoral diversity of the participants.
 - Ensure no overlap with other events and early announcements of dates and venues.
 - Inclusive, transparent, and collaborative agenda setting, ensuring the topics are relevant to all.
 - No Parallel Breakout Room to ensure inclusive and open dialogue: Having parallel breakout rooms can fragment the conversation and decrease overall engagement. By being confined to a specific group, participants miss out on the diverse insights and perspectives that could come from interacting with participants from other breakout rooms.
 - Ensure Inclusivity in Investment-Focused Events (IFE) by providing a wider range of flexible and accessible finance options, not only limited to investments but also include grants and concessional loans. These options must cater to diverse needs without imposing strict precondition and should address the various needs of different projects and sectors.
- 2. Leadership by Developed Countries:** Developed countries should assume greater responsibility for arranging global dialogues. Urge developed countries to assume the initiative in hosting Global Dialogues, making use of their advantages and capabilities to guarantee effectively coordinated events.
- 3. Maintain Technical Focus:** The inclusion of negotiation aspects takes away from the technical nature of the exchange of views. Keep the dialogues focused on the exchange of expertise and best practices rather than negotiation components.
- 4. No duplication of topics/follow-up dialogues:** crucial to fostering meaningful progress across diverse areas and maintaining inclusivity and to ensures that discussions remain relevant to the wide array of stakeholders and sectors involved, rather than focusing disproportionately on any single issue. This approach also ensures that previously underrepresented issues are brought to the forefront.

By addressing these organizational issues, the MWP global dialogues and investment-focused events can enhance success and inclusiveness, ensuring that they continue to serve as valuable platforms for exchanging ideas and strengthening global collaboration.