Arab Region Roundtable on Harnessing Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainability

16-18 April 2005, Dubai (UAE)

A Joint Activity of the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), Initiative on Science and Technology for Sustainability (ISTS) and Zayed International Prize for the Environment

The Background

During the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Initiative on Science and Technology for Sustainability (http://sustainabilityscience.org) organised a series of regional workshops to explore perspectives on core questions of sustainability science, the research agenda and infrastructural requirements. The basic goal was to improve the harnessing of science and technology to contribute to the transitions to sustainable development.

To discuss this goal further in the context of the Arab Region and to lend greater support for the necessary actions, as outlined, for example, in the Millennium Development Goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, a high-level Roundtable for the Arab region is being organised. In June 2003, a Planning Meeting for this roundtable was hosted by the Third World Academy of Sciences and supported by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences in cooperation with the Middle East Initiative at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The planning meeting affirmed the importance and urgent need for the roundtable and helped to define its scope and content. The Roundtable will provide a forum for local and regional discussions for enhancing the contributions of Science and Technology to meet the challenges of Sustainable Development. It will also catalyse the best possible partnerships among the stakeholders and foster an indigenous paradigm for sustainability.
The Arab Regional Context

Sustainable development in the Arab Region must be considered within the broad economic, political, institutional, environmental, cultural and ethical context. In order to harness science, technology and innovation for sustainable development, it is important to understand the dynamic interplay of the issues and challenges in sustainable development.

The Arab region is characterised by a singular and largely uniform arid/semi-arid ecological zone from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf. The region is also rather homogeneous in language and culture. The main engine of economic growth is oil. The challenges to sustainability are also similar, given the rates of illiteracy and relatively lower investments, human resources and capacity in science and technology. There is therefore, great promise for a high degree of regional co-operation and for evolving a shared vision for sustainability and concerted actions.

Some of the high priority issues for sustainable development in the Arab region are:
- gender equity;
- education and capacity building in science and technology;
- environmental issues - fresh water, desertification, dry land biodiversity and coastal zones;
- Alternative and renewable sources of energy;
- Cross-cutting themes of governance and S&T policy.

Thematic Priorities

The Roundtable will focus on priorities for sustainable development that are consistent with the UN’s Millennium Development Goals: promoting social and economic development while conserving natural resources and the environment. Within that framework, the Roundtable will focus on needs and opportunities of particular relevance to the Arab States, while recognizing that details will differ within the region according to local realities.

In particular, it will explore how the challenges of accelerating economic growth, relieving poverty, and enhancing human capital [health, education, gender equality] in the region can be met while at the same time relieving environment and resource problems associated with water deficits, desertification, and biodiversity loss. Special attention will be given to the cross-cutting themes of governance and policy for science and technology in addressing these priorities.

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<th>Arab World</th>
<th>World %</th>
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<td>Population</td>
<td>282 Million</td>
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<td>GNP</td>
<td>600 billion USD</td>
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<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>1 billion USD</td>
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Participants in the Arab Region Roundtable

Responses to the above challenges require that the academic community from the Arab region engages in a continuing dialogue with policy and decision makers in government, business and industry, with civil society and the development community. Active participation of natural and social scientists and engineers will be essential.
Objectives of the Roundtable

To strengthen the contributions of S & T to SD

• Create and support adequate enabling environments for scientific research.
• Act as a catalyst for networking and create linkages to share success stories about the role of S&T in meeting the challenges of sustainable development.
• Identify centers of excellence in the Arab region and mobilize resources from national and international funding sources to them.
• Strengthen the use of existing scientific knowledge.
• Enhance education and training.
• Identify institutional arrangements needed to address critical issues.

To develop partnerships

• Increase the support of Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region and encourage the linkages between the international donor community and the S&T community.
• Support appropriate technology at the local level and encourage partnerships in technology for innovative initiatives.
• Involve the private sector in the definition of the research agendas and create partnerships for funding purposes and for stimulating the research.
• Work with the private sector in order to increase awareness of the challenges of sustainable development and stimulate their involvement in technological solutions for sustainability.
• Identify mechanisms to increase interaction between the development, scientific and policy communities.
**Format and Strategy for the Roundtables**

About 30 participants will be invited to the roundtable. There will be a Keynote Address followed by thematic presentations to raise the issues and challenges in the region. A panel discussion will address the major issues relevant to harnessing science and technology for sustainable development in the Arab Region. The keynote speakers will be expected to provide a 1-3 page summary before the meeting and then act as facilitators of the discussion. The discussions should lead to a set of recommendations from the meeting, including **recommendations on follow up and indicators of success**.

On the final day the recommendations will be discussed and finalized in the form of a **declaration by the roundtable**. The declaration will be presented to high-level political leaders of the host country as well as to other countries in the region. The participants will also be requested to take these recommendations back to their home country and ensure wide distribution. Dissemination of the declaration to key international organizations is also envisaged.

Publicity for the event in the Arab region is being planned through mass media coverage / sponsorship by one of the prominent TV networks of the region. A public lecture on the eve of the roundtable by a distinguished Arab Scientist will be organised to engage the attention of the local scientific and technological community.

**Funding**

The Zayed International Prize for the Environment is generously providing for all local expenses for the event. Other expenses are likely to be sponsored by local, regional and international agencies and private companies. Fund raising in this regard is underway.

**Further Information**

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