

6th
Environmental Politics in MENA
Annual Conference

Rethinking Justice in Environmental Transition during Times of Conflict and Crisis

📍 Gefinor Rotana, Beirut

📅 May 12-13, 2025



Civil Society Facility for the Mediterranean
فرق المجتمع المدني لمنطقة المتوسط



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ALTERNATIVE
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المعهد المغربي لتحليل السياسات
MOROCCAN INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS
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Over the years, the Annual Conference on Environmental Politics has facilitated meaningful exchanges among diverse stakeholders, creating opportunities for in-depth discussions on environmental governance, equitable resource management, policy reforms and grassroots mobilization: the inaugural conference in 2021 laid the foundation for the approach we have taken since, and in subsequent conferences (in 2022, in January 2023, in May 2023, and March 2024) we further explored how concepts and notions of just environmental transition resonated in our particular contexts and societies. The 2025 edition will focus in particular on food and water justice, two of the most critical challenges influencing sustainability and equity in the MENA region. This year's discussions will bridge perspectives from North African countries which are navigating complex transitions in water governance, food sovereignty and agricultural sustainability, with other parts of the region that are reeling from the impact of years of conflict, economic crisis, occupation and instability.

By placing food and water justice at the core of this conference, the discussions will highlight policy frameworks, governance models, and grassroots initiatives that can drive a just environmental transition in a range of challenging contexts. The goal is to ensure that sustainability strategies are not only environmentally sound but also socially just, particularly for communities most affected by resource inequalities and climate impacts.

Key Themes of The Conference



WATER GOVERNANCE AND INJUSTICE

Examining the political and environmental dimensions of water mismanagement, scarcity, and the weaponization of water in conflict zones.



FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Exploring the impact of climate change on agriculture, the role of agroecology, and efforts to reduce food dependency across the MENA region.



ENVIRONMENTAL MOBILIZATION IN MENA FOR A JUST TRANSITION

Exchanging stories of mobilization, lessons from the field, and strategies for advancing environmental justice across the region.



POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Assessing and discussing the challenges of rebuilding sustainable water, food, and energy systems in post conflict countries while tackling bad governance and foreign interference.



THE ENERGY-WATER-FOOD NEXUS

Investigating the interdependencies between these three sectors and how policies must integrate justice and equity in resource management.

Objectives of The Conference

- Facilitate regional discussions on key issues related to water governance, food sovereignty, and environmental justice in post-conflict settings.
- Present ongoing research and policy recommendations from ARI and its partners.
- Offer a platform for activists and researchers to share their experiences and expertise.
- Strengthen transnational collaboration by fostering new partnerships and networks.
- Integrate conflict analysis into discussions on just environmental transition in the MENA region and globally.
- Facilitate South-South collaboration by creating a space for discussions between scholars and activists from MENA and from South America, South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.



Scan the code to visit the webpage of ARI's Environmental Politics Program



Scan the code to visit the webpage of the 'Just Transition Green Bridge' Project



Day One

MAY 12TH

9:30 A.M. – 9:45 A.M.

Welcome and opening remarks by ARI.

9:45 A.M. - 11:15 A.M

PANEL 1: Just Environmental Transition in MENA: What Lessons from other Global South contexts?

The pursuit of a just environmental transition demands a nuanced understanding of local political, social, and ecological realities. At the same time, there are insights and lessons to be drawn from other contexts, notably from those that also face weak governance, repeated crises and limited resources to finance needed adaptation. The opening panel will focus on how MENA can adapt to pressing sustainability goals by following examples and lessons from other Global South contexts. The panel will draw concrete examples from Latin America's inclusive governance practices that empower indigenous communities, Sub-Saharan Africa's decentralized policies that foster local employment and sustainable growth, and South East Asia's innovative financing tools and policy frameworks aimed at equitable climate adaptation.

A key focus will be placed on the roles of regional institutions, civil society, and global partnerships in crafting practical, context-specific approaches to sustainability, especially as Latin America, Africa, and South East Asia are regions that have navigated complex post-colonial transitions, environmental justice struggles, and socio-political transformations.

11:15 A.M. – 11:30 A.M. // BREAK

11:30 A.M. – 13:00 P.M.

**PANEL 2: Good governance for water justice in MENA
– What does it mean and how can we achieve it?**

Water governance remains one of the most pressing environmental and political issues in the region, where water scarcity is exacerbated by unequal access to water, mismanagement and losses. The implications are not just for the economy or the environment, but significant social impacts on communities and vulnerable groups. Many approaches have been developed over the years to bring success to water governance in ways that help communities and grow economies; from Integrated Water Resource Management to Water-Energy-Food nexus thinking. On the socio-legal side, water rights and water security are highlighted as fundamental requirements to protect people's livelihoods and wellbeing. More recently, water justice as a framework for good water governance has been growing in influence among environmental and activist groups across the globe.

This panel will explore the water governance challenges of the MENA subregions, highlighting policy successes, governance failures, and transboundary conflicts. Thinking through the different approaches for better water outcomes, the discussion will center on how governance reforms, community-led initiatives, and regional cooperation can realize a more equitable future for water, indicating ways forward for policymakers and civil society organizations alike.

1:00 P.M. – 2:30 P.M. // LUNCH BREAK

2:30 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

PANEL 3: Just Transition in the Shadow of War: How to Integrate Notions of Environmental Justice in Post Conflict Reconstruction and Recovery

The environmental consequences of conflict are profound and long-lasting and must be accounted for in any discussion on peace building and reconstruction. Rebuilding environmental infrastructure is one of the most pressing challenges for war-torn countries such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and Lebanon, where water systems, energy grids, and agricultural networks have been deliberately targeted or severely damaged. In addition, occupation and conflict-related displacement lead to environmental impacts that continue even after the fighting has stopped. This panel will explore how reconstruction and recovery efforts can integrate sustainability and justice principles, preventing recovery processes from deepening existing inequalities. A key focus will be the role of displaced populations and refugees in shaping environmental policies, as well as the difficulties post-conflict societies face in securing international support for just environmental transitions. The panel will also address the need for international accountability regarding environmental destruction as a tool of war and will discuss long-term sustainability challenges and governance in post-conflict settings.



Day Two

MAY 13TH

9:30 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

PANEL 4: Food Sovereignty in MENA – Climate Change, Agriculture, and Policy Responses

Food sovereignty is an increasingly urgent concern in the MENA region, where reliance on imported foods, stresses from climate change, unsustainable water use, and land grabs threaten the stability of local food systems. Decades of unsustainable agro-economic planning and policies have further damaged the region's prospects of achieving sustainable food production, and conflict-induced destruction of agricultural lands in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen has left millions dependent on humanitarian aid and food imports, further entrenching vulnerability. This panel will identify the main obstacles countries in the region face with regards to becoming more food secure and sovereign and will present ongoing research on how policies can support small farmers and promote sustainable food production, with a particular focus on agroecology, trade policies, and community-led farming initiatives in different MENA countries such as Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia.

11:00 A.M. – 11:15 A.M. // BREAK

11:15 A.M. – 12:45 P.M.

PANEL 5: The Energy-Water-Food Nexus – A Framework for Just Transitions: Lessons learned across the Mediterranean on Governance and Localized Solutions

The interconnections between energy, water, and food policies are often overlooked in sustainability planning. These sectors are inherently interdependent, demanding coordinated policy approaches to achieve equitable and sustainable outcomes. A nexus approach, which integrates management and governance across these areas, has proven effective globally, fostering policy alignment and cooperation among diverse stakeholders.

The discussion will highlight case studies from Mediterranean countries on how renewable energy expansion is closely tied to water management through desalination and irrigation projects, impacting food security directly. Panelists will highlight the governance challenges encountered and the innovative solutions developed in these case studies, emphasizing how nexus strategies help avoid negative trade-offs between sectors and protect vulnerable communities from disproportionate impacts.

Drawing from successful international models within the Mediterranean region and the EU's framework, this session will further elaborate on how such nexus-based initiatives can guide policy reforms, promote equitable resource management, and enable proactive responses to regional sustainability challenges.

12:45 P.M. – 2:15 P.M. // LUNCH BREAK

2:15 P.M. – 3:45 P.M.

PANEL 6: Environmentalism From Below: Can Grassroots Responses Lead the Way to More Sustainable and Equitable Environmental Outcomes?

Environmental movements have emerged as critical actors in advocating for equitable resource governance, protesting extractivism and environmental harms, and even modeling a different relationship of humans to nature. The Arab Reform Initiative has been working to generate knowledge on the various forms, demands, and expressions of environmental struggle and activism, understand its modes of organization, document state responses, and explore how actors find spaces for action in severely asymmetrical power relations. In this panel we will present the results of our research on grassroots responses in four countries of the region.

From Iraq, how are environmentalists navigating the increased authoritarianism of the Iraqi state? Amid entrenched political and corporate interests, can Iraqi activists find some leverage? In the case of Lebanon, what non-state approaches have proven most effective in advocating for environmental protection or prefiguring a different relationship to nature? Turning to Morocco, and focusing on water scarcity and degradation, what innovative strategies are environmental activists, movements, and community-driven initiatives employing to navigate systemic barriers? In Tunisia, and specifically in the energy sector, what factors shape the dynamics of resistance to large-scale renewable energy projects, and what is the promise of community energy initiatives?

Finally, the panel will reflect on common themes that cut across national contexts, and consider the broader implications of this research for advancing a just environmental transition in the region. Panelists will discuss how grassroots perspectives can inform more inclusive and transformative policy frameworks, and what solidarities are needed to sustain these movements going forward.

3:45 P.M. – 4:00 P.M. // CLOSING REMARKS