

SAUDI ARABIA'S FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

By

Arhama Siddiqa

Research Fellow

Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CMEA), ISSI

Edited by

Amina Khan

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In recent decades, climate change has become one of the most critical issues for international, national and local communities. The concept of a green economy arose in response to international environmental and climate issues, as well as their impact on development and economic well-being. The green economy, because of its potential to integrate the environmental, economic, and social components of sustainable development, has become a tool of attaining sustainable development and attracting international investment. For decades, Saudi Arabia's economy has been highly vulnerable to oil price shocks. Climate change presents an additional challenge to Saudi Arabia's economy as it affects both the oil and non-oil economic sectors. Cognizant of the potential threats posed by climate change, Saudi Arabia has expressed its intention to engage in restorative measures and planning in accordance with the Kingdom's efforts towards economic diversification.



Since the launch of Vision 2030 in 2016, the Kingdom has taken significant steps to scale up its climate action and environmental protection. The Saudi Green Initiative (SGI) unifies all sustainability efforts in the Kingdom to increase reliance on clean energy and concurrently offsets the impact of fossil fuels to combat climate change. The SGI oversees Saudi Arabia's work to combat climate change, facilitating the entire society, and public and private sector collaboration to rapidly scale-up climate action. Its sub-projects include, establishing the sustainable tourism global center (STGC) and the ocean exploration foundation; joining the global methane pledge, launching several biodiversity initiatives to breed and protect endangered species and implementing a comprehensive transformation program to make Riyadh one of the world's most sustainable cities. Key elements of this initiative include, clean energy sector, carbon emissions reduction, oceans protection, wildlife defense, desertification prevention, and increased recycling. Furthermore, SGI works collaboratively with government ministries, private sector entities, and foreign governments to bring together environmental efforts and rapid scale climate action.

In 2019, Saudi Arabia launched an ambitious \$23 billion project to create open green areas in the capital, Riyadh, including the world's biggest city park. During its Presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) in 2020, Saudi Arabia launched the concept of the circular carbon economy (CCE) as a framework for reducing emissions to a level consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement. Through its Ministry of Energy and the Saudi energy ecosystem, Riyadh has placed the CCE framework at the heart of its climate change strategy. The CCE framework, pioneered by the Kingdom and endorsed last year by world leaders during the G20 summit, enables countries to manage their carbon emissions in their own way, at their own pace, while taking into account their own national economic, political and social circumstances. The framework's four pillars reducing,

recycling, reusing and removing carbon emissions and products serve as a holistic guide for achieving net-zero through gradual cost-effective steps.¹ The concept, which was endorsed by both G20 leaders and energy ministers, comes at a time when Saudi Arabia appears to have stabilized its domestic emissions after decades of rapid growth.



In October 2021, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman launched the Middle East Green Initiative ², aiming to secure about \$10.4 billion for an investment fund and clean energy project to reduce regional carbon emissions. Saudi Arabia is also collaborating with other Arab governments in this initiative, which includes a pledge to plant an additional 40 billion trees, the world's largest forestation effort to turn the Gulf region green. MBS has also pledged that the country would reach net zero emissions by 2060 by investing more than \$186 billion into the green economy over that time.³ Riyadh aims to reduce its carbon emissions by 278 million tons per year by 2030 and that the adoption of the circular carbon economy, based on zero waste, will help reach the target. Saudi Aramco announced that it aims to achieve net zero emissions from its operations by

- ¹ "Middle East Newsletter: Saudi Arabia Makes Landmark Net-Zero Pledge," *Bloomberg*, October 24, 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2021-10-24/middle-east-newsletter-saudi-arabia-makes-landmark-net-zero-pledge>
- ² "Saudi Arabia outlines plans under Mideast Green Initiative," *Reuters*, October 25, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/mideast-green-initiative-invest-104-bln-says-saudi-crown-prince-2021-10-25/>
- ³ "Oil giant Saudi Arabia pledges 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2060," *Washington Post*, October 23, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/saudi-carbon-zero-oil-climate/2021/10/23/4ddadae0-340e-11ec-8036-7db255bff176_story.html

2050 while also expanding its maximum sustained production capacity to 13 million barrels per day.⁴ In this regard, the Saudi Government is setting up the required infrastructure, which includes establishing a regional carbon capture and storage center, an early storm warning center and a regional cloud-seeding program. Cloud seeding is a highly effective tool when it comes to combating drought and supporting vegetation & agriculture.

In light of the Saudi Green and Middle East Green initiatives, the Kingdom has also launched programs in the areas of environmental protection and energy transformation to contribute to a sustainable future. Clean-energy output in the Middle East now stands at 7 percent, and Saudi Arabia has stated that it will cooperate with its neighbors to reduce carbon emissions from hydrocarbon production in the region by more than 60 percent. In August, 2022, Saudi's National Water Company recently announced new projects that aim to:

- Expand coverage of water & wastewater networks
- Increase sewage treatment plants' capacity
- Improve the sustainability of water services & increase accessibility

In November, 2022, Saudi's flagship climate events, the Middle East Initiative Summit and the Saudi Green Initiative Forum will be held in tandem with COP27.



Pakistan and Saudi Arabia converge on their respective 'green initiatives'. In this regard, both the Saudi Green Initiative and the Middle East Green Initiative are aligned closely with Pakistan's Climate

⁴ "Aramco aims for net zero emissions from operations by 2050, CEO says," *Reuters*, October 23, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/aramco-aims-net-zero-emissions-operations-by-2050-ceo-says-2021-10-23/>

⁵ "Saudi Green Initiative Targets," Saudi Green Initiative. <https://www.saudigreeninitiative.org/targets/>

Change Initiatives – ‘Clean and Green Pakistan’ and the ‘Ten Billion Tree Tsunami. In February 2022, signed a wide-ranging memorandum of understanding (MoU) to cooperate in nine important areas which include nature protection, biodiversity, forestation, pollution control and management of toxic waste.⁶ Pakistan and Saudi officials have also discussed the Miyawaki forest technique successfully implemented in Pakistan. This technique helps ensure lowering of temperature, soil conservation, supports local wildlife and sequestration of carbon.⁷ The different phases of cooperation will commence with consultations between experts from both sides which will lead up to visits by Pakistani experts who worked on the billion-tree tsunami project to help KSA finalize the Kingdom's plantation plan. In the follow-up phase, Pakistan would also export its workforce to the Kingdom comprising of people who have experience in forestation initiatives. Undoubtedly, tackling climate change is an avenue which can give Pak-Saudi ties impetus to further grow and pave the way for a holistic partnership.

Similar to the rest of the world, the leadership in KSA is focused on issues related to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, they are facing a future where the economy they built around the export of fossil fuels will no longer suffice to support the needs of their people. Hence, these initiatives undertaken by KSA, aim to reduce regional tensions, minimize damage to Saudi interests and consolidate Saudi influence where possible.

⁶ “Pakistan and Saudi Arabia sign Memorandum of Understanding for Environmental Cooperation,” *Ministry of Climate Change Pakistan*, February 2022.

<https://mocc.gov.pk/NewsDetail/ZjZiYTFjYmEtZWZmNS00NGFmLWI2OWYtMzk2NGQxMjIwZGMw>

⁷ “Green diplomacy: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia sign environmental cooperation agreement,” *World Asia*, February 10, 2022.

<https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/green-diplomacy-pakistan-saudi-arabia-sign-environmental-cooperation-agreement-1.85599183>