



Workshop

Driving green innovation and growth through SMEs

18 November 2026

13:00–16:00 | Room TBC

Background and regional context

Our planet is facing mounting environmental pressures from pollution, unsustainable resource use, deforestation and climate change. Rising temperatures, water scarcity, energy challenges and threats to food security are affecting millions of people. Global resource extraction has tripled over the past five decades and could increase by a further 60% by 2060 if current trends continue.¹ These trends underscore the need to accelerate the transition towards green solutions that protect the environment while creating new opportunities for sustainable economic development.

These challenges are particularly acute in the Arab region. Water scarcity remains a major concern, with 19 out of 22 Arab countries below the renewable water scarcity threshold and 13 experiencing absolute water scarcity.² Djibouti is one of the most water-stressed countries in the region, with only 185 cubic metres of renewable water resources available per person annually, far below the absolute water scarcity threshold.³

Somalia has experienced repeated climate shocks, with below-average rainfall affecting crop yields, depleting water sources and causing significant livestock losses.⁴ In State of Palestine, limited access to water resources and damage to water infrastructure continue to threaten public health, with drinking water availability in Gaza City falling to less than 6 litres per person per day. In the Syrian Arab Republic, only half of the country's water infrastructure remains functional, highlighting the need for resilient water systems and sustainable resource management. These challenges are compounded by food insecurity.⁵ In Somalia, the number of people facing hunger has nearly doubled since 2025, reaching 6.5 million, with one in three people expected to experience crisis-level hunger.⁶ Rising food prices, poverty, conflict and displacement continue to increase vulnerability as the effects of climate change intensify.

Iraq is strengthening its efforts to address the growing impacts of climate change, including water scarcity, land degradation, recurrent heatwaves, and increasing sand and dust storms, while advancing measures to enhance energy security and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.⁷ Against this backdrop, the Green Growth Framework of Iraq provides a pathway for promoting green investment and finance, supporting innovation and capacity development, and strengthening public-private partnerships, with a focus on the energy, water and agriculture sectors. These efforts can contribute to green job creation, greater economic competitiveness and increased participation by young people and women in the transition towards more sustainable growth.⁸

Across the region, significant efforts are also under way to accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Morocco has emerged as a regional leader, with renewable energy accounting for around 38% of installed electricity capacity and a target of exceeding 52% by 2030.⁹ Jordan has also expanded its use of clean energy, with renewable sources contributing around 27% of its electricity mix by 2024.¹⁰

Building on this progress, there is considerable scope to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of the region's water, food and energy systems by addressing climate change, pressure on natural resources, dependence on fossil fuels, fragile infrastructure, political instability, geopolitical tensions and limited

investment. Innovation can help turn these challenges into opportunities by enabling small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs to develop climate-smart solutions, attract investment, create green jobs and contribute to sustainable growth.

The two-day workshop brings together key stakeholders to explore enabling policies, successful models and financing tools. It also provides practical training, a regional hackathon, and opportunities to connect with partners and investors, with a view to advancing green and climate-resilient business models.

Objectives

- Highlight climate-smart solutions and their contribution to sustainable agriculture, water efficiency, the circular economy and clean energy.
- Discuss emerging trends, opportunities and challenges in the green economy, including innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable business models.
- Explore the role of Governments, institutions, investors and ecosystem actors in creating enabling environments for green SMEs.
- Examine approaches to strengthening green entrepreneurship through financing, capacity-building, technology adoption and partnerships.
- Showcase regional and international examples of successful green solutions, enterprises and growth models.

Participants

The workshop brings together a diverse range of stakeholders, including:



Policymakers, government entities, research and academic institutions, and relevant sector stakeholders.



Business support organizations, incubators, accelerators and other ecosystem actors.



Young entrepreneurs, SMEs and startups in green sectors, as well as researchers and technologists working on climate adaptation solutions.



Investors, development partners, and organizations supporting green sector growth and innovation.

Agenda

Time	Title	Session description	Speakers
13:00–14:00	Session 1 Regional climate, water, energy, and food challenges and opportunities	The opening session explores key climate, water, energy, and food challenges and opportunities in the Arab and Mediterranean region, in the light of recent regional developments and their implications for sustainable development. It also highlights the role of SMEs in driving innovation and scaling up green solutions.	Sean Ratka, Economic Affairs Officer, UN-ESCWA Mustafa Almuslih, National Project Coordinator, International Trade Centre (ITC) Mohammed Abdulameer, Senior Project Officer, International Labour Organization (ILO) Mounes Neamah, Project Manager, Water and Energy for Food (WE4F)
14:00–15:00	Session 2 Regional programmes supporting SMEs in the green economy	The session highlights key regional initiatives, including the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) regional programme on green technologies and sustainable business models, as well as relevant regional programmes. These initiatives support SMEs and young people in adopting green technologies, strengthening value chains and the circular economy, and building partnerships that contribute to the region's green transition.	Osama Rais, Chair of Agripreneurship Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) Sami Ouechtati, Technical Advisor for Water and Agriculture, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Zakarya Baicha, Leading Expert, Regional Training Programme on Green Technologies and Business Models (Arab Fund) Jooyoung Yoo, Senior MEL Officer, Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) Esmat Karadsheh, Coordinator, Interreg NEXT MED, Eastern Med Office

Time	Title	Session description	Speakers
15:00–16:00	Session 3 Financing green innovation	This focused session explores green financing opportunities and ways to facilitate access by SMEs and startups to the financing and partnerships needed to scale up sustainable solutions and increase their positive environmental impact.	Alaa Al-Nuimat, Green Entrepreneurship Program Officer, Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) Jalal Jalil, Private Sector Development & Economic Growth Specialist, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Pamela Saber, Investment Unit Manager, Berytech

Endnotes

1. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and International Resource Panel (IRP), [Global Resources Outlook 2024](#), 1 March 2024.
2. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Water challenges in the Arab region, 2024 ([E/ESCWA/EC.9/2024/8](#)).
3. World Bank, [Djibouti Country Climate and Development Report](#), 2024; World Bank, [Djibouti Groundwater Resilience and Water Supply Project](#), 2026.
4. United Nations, [Somalia faces escalating crisis amid drought, conflict and price hikes](#), 26 February 2025.
5. Oxfam, [Middle East water crisis: when conflict meets scarcity](#), 20 May 2026.
6. Oxfam Ireland, [Millions of people across Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia facing drought crisis, as cost of water increases by 2000% in worst hit areas](#), 9 March 2026.
7. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), [Iraq launches background documents for its updated Nationally Determined Contribution to advance climate action](#), 21 September 2025.
8. UNDP, [The Green Growth Framework of Iraq](#), 1 February 2026.
9. International Trade Administration, [Morocco – Energy](#), 2025.
10. Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources of Jordan, [Achievements in the Energy and Mining Sectors in Jordan](#), 2025.