



Arab Reform Initiative

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# How can activists best advance environmental reforms in MENA?

→ Rory Quick





***\*This paper is the winning submission of our 2021 Student Essay Contest.***

Decarbonising the current energy system does not secure a sustainable future if challenges beyond carbon emission are ignored and the economic model which continues to exacerbate the challenges we face is not rectified. Genuine environmental reform requires an intersectional approach, one which does not just patch over problems but instigates reform. The socio-political and environmental crises we face are symptoms of the same problem and must be treated as such. In order to reach a sustainable future, policies should resolve current issues without creating or exacerbating existing challenges. If there is a reason for social movements to exist, it is to challenge dominant values as flexible and changeable and to offer alternative ways to live. Across the MENA region, there are growing calls - from experts and activists - for reform in the region to simultaneously deal with wider socio-political issues whilst decarbonizing energy systems.

In the MENA region, states are preoccupied with developing renewable energy (RE) at large scale. Examples include Morocco's Quarzazate Noor Solar Plant and Dubai's Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park. This is an extension of the existing energy model. Megaprojects are political as much as economic projects. They support exclusionary political regimes and enable states to strengthen existing socio-political systems, and thus further reduce the political autonomy of the individual. Energy megaprojects are projections of state centralization, as they require no input from the localities in which they are placed. They therefore actively reduce political freedom. An alternative model - the decentralised RE model - allows for ownership and operation of RE to remain in the communities where it operates. Solar and wind technology is scalable, whereas previous technology was not. This allows for the creation of an energy system that is not only sustainable but also democratically owned and designed, and socially just. A decentralised system, whereby individuals have a direct say in how their energy systems operate, is vital in ensuring energy justice is achieved alongside climate justice.

The structure of energy systems has wide-reaching cultural, socio-political, and economic impacts. MENA activists must understand energy as a critical tool for advancing environmental, political, and social justice causes. Since the energy



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technology installed today will operate for years to come, we face a once-in-a-century opportunity to build a fairer and greener system. Efforts should be focused on:

- Increasing awareness and education on the improvements a decentralised energy system would bring to communities across MENA
- Encouraging the introduction of regulation allowing for/encouraging the installation of RE at the community level.
- Growth of locally led organisations supporting community ownership of RE assets, developing frameworks which can be implemented across the region.

The barriers to consumer ownership of RE are political, legal, administrative, economic, managerial, and cultural. Activists must recognise that developments are needed on a number of fronts simultaneously.

	<b>Centralised model of RE</b>	<b>Decentralised model of RE</b>
Understanding of energy	A commodity, the enabler of capital accumulation and economic expansion.	A resource to be democratized and shared to societies needs.
Objective	De-carbonise the existing economy. Separate the climate crisis from the economy, implying that it can be resolved without addressing socio-economic problems, and vice versa.	Transition to a de-carbonised representation of energy which better serves the needs of all. Climate issues are linked, highlighting the need to move away from globalised capitalism with the Ea
Solution		



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## About the author

### Rory Quick

Rory is a recent graduate from the University of Exeter, where he read Arabic and Islamic Studies, and is currently studying for a masters in Economics and Policy of Energy and Environment at University College London. He enjoys all things MENA and seeks to combine this with a passion for renewable energy and sustainability.

## About Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

- We produce original research informed by local experiences and partner with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

Founded in 2005, the Arab Reform Initiative is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

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