



REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics and Criticism***Metaphors of sustainable environment and essential-needs supply in Saudi Arabia: A framing-theory approach**Saif Saif Abdullah Altamimi¹ & Neelofar Hussain Wani²¹Department of English Language and Literature, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia²Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University Abha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*Correspondence: sai.altamimi@psau.edu.sa**ABSTRACT**

This article examines how public Saudi discourse frames sustainable environment and essential-needs supply through metaphor. It analyzes a purposive bilingual sample of official Arabic and English discourse from the Saudi Green Initiative, the General Food Security Authority, and the Saudi Water Authority. The study is empirical in a qualitative discourse-analytic sense: it works with real-life institutional expressions rather than invented examples, while avoiding the stronger claim that the sample statistically represents all Saudi media. The article asks how recurrent metaphorical expressions define environmental and supply problems, allocate responsibility, evaluate policy action, and recommend solutions. The method combines framing theory, conceptual metaphor analysis, and critical metaphor analysis. Every Arabic expression cited in the analysis is presented in Arabic script, romanized form, and English translation. The results show that Saudi sustainability discourse repeatedly presents environmental transformation as movement toward a green future, climate action as struggle, governance as coordination under an umbrella, and food and water provision as security, continuity, reserve, system management, and early-warning preparedness. The article argues that these metaphors form an integrated discourse of governable transformation: the sustainable environment is framed not as a detached ecological ideal but as a national project linked to quality of life, strategic planning, future generations, and the protection of essential resources. At the same time, the analysis shows that the same frames can narrow public visibility. Journey metaphors make transformation appear orderly; war metaphors sharpen urgency; greening metaphors give ecological change a hopeful developmental vocabulary; security metaphors legitimize coordination and preparedness. Yet each metaphor also backgrounds something: conflict over pace, ecological tradeoffs, energy-sector tensions, demand restraint, import dependence, and the deliberative dimensions of sustainability. The article concludes that metaphor is one of the central mechanisms through which Saudi sustainability and essential-needs supply become publicly intelligible.

KEYWORDS: metaphor, framing theory, Saudi Arabia, sustainability discourse, food security, water security, Arabic discourse, critical metaphor analysis, discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia's contemporary sustainability discourse is a particularly rich site for discourse analysis because it is asked to do more than describe environmental policy. It must make climate action, energy transition, food security, water management, quality of life, strategic preparedness, and national development appear as parts of the same public project. The language of this project is not neutral. It turns policy into movement, future into destination, climate change into a challenge to be confronted, governance into an umbrella, food provision into security, water supply into a protected flow, and reserves into a buffer against crisis. The present article examines those metaphorical choices as framing devices rather than as decorative expressions.

The title brings together two domains that are often studied separately: sustainable environment and essential-needs supply. Sustainable environment refers here to climate action, greening, energy transition, environmental protection, land restoration, emissions reduction, and quality of life. Essential-needs supply refers to public discourse on food security, water security, strategic food storage, emergency supply, essential commodities, infrastructure planning, demand management, and continuity of provision. In official Saudi discourse, these fields overlap because both are connected to national resilience. A greener future requires secure water and food systems; secure food and water systems, in turn, are presented as conditions of a liveable and sustainable future.

The article's central claim is that, within the selected official corpus, Saudi discourse appears to use a coherent metaphor system in which environmental transformation is framed as a journey toward a green future, climate action as struggle, governance as coordinated coverage, and food and water supply as security, flow, reserve, and early warning. This claim is not offered as a statistical generalization about all Saudi media or all public Saudi discourse; it is grounded in the repeated Arabic and English expressions documented in Tables 1-4 and interpreted through framing theory and metaphor scholarship (Burgers et al., 2016; Entman, 1993; Semino et al., 2018; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). These metaphors matter because they can guide public interpretation by selecting particular aspects of complex issues and making them more salient. A journey frame can invite the audience to imagine a route, pace, and destination. A security frame can orient the audience toward threat, protection, preparedness, and institutional responsibility. A greening frame can encourage readers to see ecological action as renewal and prosperity. A roadmap frame can make policy implementation appear calculable and directed.

The study is grounded in the view that frames define problems, diagnose causes, evaluate them morally, and recommend treatments (Entman, 1993). It also draws on metaphor scholarship that treats metaphor as a conceptual and discursive resource, not merely as figurative ornament (Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff, 1993; Semino et al., 2018). A public expression such as "fight against climate change" is not only a familiar idiom. It performs discursive labor: it identifies climate change as a hostile pressure, casts collective action as morally necessary, and makes coordinated intervention appear appropriate. Similarly, an Arabic expression such as "sadd al-iḥṭiyājāt min al-sila' al-ghidhā'iyyah" (covering/filling needs for food commodities) frames need as a gap to be filled and public supply as an act of stabilization.

The article therefore asks four main research questions and one subsidiary comparative question: What conceptual metaphors dominate official Saudi Arabic and English discourse on sustainable environment and essential-needs supply? How do these metaphors perform Entman's framing functions? How are environmental sustainability and essential-needs supply linked through shared metaphors of security, continuity, growth, journey, and national transformation? What do these metaphors make visible, and what do they obscure? As a subsidiary question, how do the Arabic and English examples in this purposive corpus differ in agency, responsibility, temporality, and audience orientation?

The contribution of the article is twofold. Empirically, it analyzes real-life examples from Saudi Arabic and English institutional discourse and gives Arabic expressions in transliteration with English translation. Theoretically, it treats essential-needs supply as part of sustainability discourse. This is important because food and water are not only administrative categories; they are ecological and political categories, as water-energy-food nexus research has shown that food, water, energy, livelihoods, and environmental pressures are interdependent rather than separable policy silos (Endo et al., 2017; Leck et al., 2015). Food security involves imports, domestic production, waste, reserves, and nutrition. Water security involves desalination, energy, infrastructure, consumption, demand management, and long-term risk. A discourse analysis that studies "sustainability" while ignoring food and water supply therefore misses a central part of how environmental futures are made meaningful in arid, resource-sensitive settings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Framing, metaphor, and public reasoning

Framing theory begins from the premise that communication is selective. Frames do not merely add emphasis to information; they shape what counts as information in the first place. Entman's (1993) influential formulation defines framing as selecting some aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication, while later work has clarified how frames organize both textual meaning and public interpretation (Burgers et al., 2016; de Vreese, 2005). Four operations are especially important for the present analysis: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral evaluations, and recommending treatments. In environmental discourse, a single metaphorical expression may perform several of these functions at once. "Climate challenge" defines the issue as a test; "fight against climate change" diagnoses a threat and recommends mobilization; "water security" evaluates water provision as a matter of collective safety.

Later framing research has stressed that frames operate across production, text, and reception (de Vreese, 2005). The present article focuses on textual framing, but it does not treat texts as closed objects. This approach is consistent with discourse-analytic research that treats institutional texts as situated communicative practices rather than neutral containers of facts (Baker et al., 2008). Official discourse is written for audiences. It anticipates what is intelligible, persuasive, reassuring, and legitimate. This is why metaphor matters. Metaphors are compact interpretive packages. They turn abstract policy objects into familiar scenes: a road, a fight, a shield, a flow, a reservoir, an inclusive social whole, a map, or an umbrella.

Burgers et al. (2016) use the term figurative framing to describe how metaphors and other figures shape public discourse. Their work is useful because it connects metaphor to the broader framing literature rather than isolating metaphor as a purely linguistic feature. Semino et al. (2018) similarly argue for an integrated approach to metaphor and framing across cognition, discourse, and practice. This article follows that integrated view. It does not claim that every metaphor has a simple or direct psychological effect. Rather, it examines how recurring metaphorical patterns contribute to a public frame in which some problems, agents, values, and solutions become more visible than others.

2.2 Metaphor identification and critical metaphor analysis

Conceptual metaphor theory provides the vocabulary for describing mappings between source and target domains. A target domain is the issue or experience the discourse is trying to make intelligible; a source domain is the more familiar field of experience from which meaning is borrowed. This distinction is necessary because it shows not only which words are metaphorical but also how policy meaning is organized. Road, path, and journey vocabulary does different framing work from security, protection, and warning vocabulary. In this study, the target domains are environmental sustainability, climate action, energy transition, food security, water security, and essential-needs supply. The source domains include JOURNEY, PATH, WAR, STRUGGLE, GREENING, GROWTH, SECURITY, PROTECTION, FLOW, SYSTEM, RESERVE, EARLY WARNING, UMBRELLA, INCLUSION/SOCIAL TOTALITY, and CONTAINER/GAP. A phrase such as "roadmap" maps a journey and navigation schema onto policy implementation. A phrase such as "food security" maps protection and threat management onto food provision.

The identification of metaphor is not left to impressionistic reading. The method is informed by the Pragglejaz Group's (2007) Metaphor Identification Procedure, which asks analysts to compare a lexical unit's contextual meaning with a more basic meaning and then decide whether the contextual meaning can be understood by comparison with the basic meaning. For instance, "umbrella" has a basic meaning as a physical object providing cover. In "under one umbrella," the contextual meaning is institutional coordination. The relation between cover and coordination is metaphorical.

Critical metaphor analysis asks what these mappings do in social and institutional discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004; Musolff, 2012). This critical step matters because metaphor can naturalize policy choices. If energy transition is a journey, then movement appears normal and delay appears undesirable, but conflict over route and destination may become less visible. If supply is security, then monitoring, reserve capacity, and centralized coordination become protective duties, but consumption, inequality, and ecological cost may be backgrounded.

2.3 Ecolinguistics and Saudi sustainability discourse

Ecolinguistics broadens the field of analysis by asking how discourse shapes relationships among humans,

nonhuman nature, resources, technologies, and futures. Alexander and Stibbe (2014) distinguish between analyzing ecological discourse and analyzing discourse ecologically. This article does both. It studies explicit environmental discourse in the Saudi Green Initiative, but it also reads food and water discourse ecologically because supply systems are material systems. They involve land, energy, desalination, imports, waste, infrastructure, and demand.

Saudi-specific studies provide an important empirical base. Almaghlouth's (2022) corpus-based study of Saudi online sustainability discourse found action-oriented and information-rich patterns in the discourse of the Saudi Green Initiative, Green Riyadh, and King Salman Park. Hameed et al. (2022) analyzed media discourse on the Saudi Green Initiative and found that it was presented as an ambitious and ecologically beneficial government venture. Those studies are essential because they show that Saudi sustainability discourse is not random; it is patterned around action, goals, national identity, green transformation, and official agency.

The present study extends that work in two ways. First, it focuses specifically on metaphor as a mechanism of framing. Second, it connects environmental sustainability to essential-needs supply. This extension is supported by water-energy-food nexus scholarship, which emphasizes that water, food, energy, livelihoods, and environmental management are linked in practice and should not be analyzed only through sectoral silos (Endo et al., 2017; Leck et al., 2015). The connection also matters discursively because food and water are among the most concrete domains through which sustainability enters everyday life. A discourse of "green future" may remain abstract unless it is linked to the security of water, the reliability of food, and the continuity of essential goods. Saudi official discourse repeatedly makes that link, and it does so through metaphor.

3. Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation combines framing theory, conceptual metaphor theory, and critical metaphor analysis. Entman's four framing functions are used as the main interpretive grid. First, problem definition asks what the discourse presents as the issue: climate change, emissions, environmental degradation, water scarcity, supply interruption, import dependence, food waste, or fragmented governance. Second, causal interpretation asks what causes or conditions are implied: global climate pressure, national transformation, resource scarcity, supply-chain risk, or the need to coordinate sectors. Third, moral evaluation asks what values are invoked: responsibility, resilience, national leadership, quality of life, protection of future generations, innovation, and sustainability. Fourth, treatment recommendation asks what action is made to appear reasonable: greening, energy transition, strategic reserves, early-warning systems, integrated infrastructure, public-private cooperation, or demand management.

Conceptual metaphor theory supplies the descriptive vocabulary. The article treats expressions such as "tumahhid al-Mamlakah al-ṭarīq naḥwa ghadīn akthar istidāmah" (the Kingdom paves the way toward a more sustainable tomorrow) as instances of SUSTAINABILITY IS A PATH and THE FUTURE IS A DESTINATION. It treats "al-ta'mīn al-sarī' wa-l-mawthūq li-sila' āminah wa-asāsiyyah" (rapid and reliable securing of safe and essential goods) as an instance of SUPPLY IS PROTECTION. It treats "niẓām li-l-indhār al-mubakkir li-l-amn al-ghidhā'i" (an early-warning system for food security) as an instance of SUPPLY RISK IS APPROACHING DANGER.

Critical metaphor analysis then asks what social argument is being made. The analysis does not assume that official metaphors are simply manipulative. Many metaphors are necessary because climate, water, and food systems are complex and require communicable public language. The critical question is more precise: what does each metaphor highlight, what does it hide, and how does it arrange agency? The study is interested in the architecture of the discourse: how several metaphor families work together to make sustainability appear as a planned, coordinated, measurable, protective, and future-oriented national project.

4. Data and Methodology

4.1 Research design

The study is a qualitative, corpus-assisted micro-analysis of official Saudi discourse. It is corpus-assisted because the data were assembled as a small bilingual research corpus and coded systematically. It is qualitative because the purpose is not to estimate frequencies across the whole Saudi media ecology, but to analyze how salient official expressions work as frames. This distinction is important. A large-scale corpus study would require

automated collection, tokenization, concordancing, and reliability testing across a much larger archive. The present article offers a transparent, replicable close analysis that can serve as a foundation for such future work. The corpus consists of 36 metaphorically salient expressions: 24 Arabic expressions and 12 English expressions. The expressions were selected from official public sources: the Saudi Green Initiative Arabic and English pages, the General Food Security Authority’s Arabic food-security page, and the Saudi Water Authority Arabic sustainability and English Vision 2030 pages. The sample was chosen because these sources represent the two domains named in the title: environmental sustainability and essential-needs supply. The selection privileges expressions that are repeated, programmatic, institutionally prominent, or analytically dense.

4.2 Corpus construction and selection criteria

Data collection followed four criteria. First, the expression had to come from an official Saudi institutional source or a Saudi official initiative page. Second, the expression had to refer to one of the two broad research fields named in the title: sustainable environment or essential-needs supply. Within those two fields, the coding scheme then distinguished more specific target domains such as climate action, energy transition, food security, water security, and governance. Third, the expression had to contain a metaphorical or frame-building lexical choice, such as path, umbrella, combat, green future, security, reserve, early warning, flow, or gap-filling. Fourth, the sample had to include both Arabic and English discourse so that local and international audience orientations could be compared without claiming that the sample represents all Saudi public discourse.

The Arabic portion of the corpus includes transliterated expressions such as “*namḍī bi-l-Mamlakah naḥwa al-ḥiqbah al-khaḍrā’ al-qādimah*” (we move the Kingdom toward the coming green era), “*tawḥīd juḥūd al-Mamlakah li-mukāfaḥat taghayyur al-munākḥ*” (unifying the Kingdom’s efforts to combat climate change), and “*barnāmaj al-iḥtiyātī wa-l-khazn al-istirātijī li-l-aghdhiyah*” (the program of food reserve and strategic storage). The English portion includes “a greener future and better quality of life,” “shaping the path to a sustainable future,” “fight against climate change,” “whole-of-society initiative,” “under the umbrella of the green initiatives,” “water security management,” and “ensuring the sustainability of water supply.”

Table 1. Primary discourse sources and selected examples

Source	L a n - g u a g e	Examples with transliteration and translation	Analytical relevance
Saudi Green Initiative Arabic page	Arabic	<i>namḍī bi-l-Mamlakah naḥwa al-ḥiqbah al-khaḍrā’ al-qādimah</i> — we move the Kingdom toward the coming green era; <i>tumahhid al-Mamlakah al-ṭarīq</i> — the Kingdom paves the way; <i>taḥta miḍallah wāḥidah</i> — under one umbrella	Environmental governance, energy transition, greening, future, coordination
General Food Security Authority food-security page	Arabic	<i>sadd al-iḥtiyājāt min al-sila’ al-ghidhā’iyyah</i> — covering/filling needs for food commodities; <i>nizām li-l-indhār al-mubakkir li-l-amn al-ghidhā’ī</i> — early-warning system for food security	Food security, essential goods, strategic reserve, crisis readiness
Saudi Water Authority sustainability page	Arabic	<i>rasm khāriḥat al-ṭarīq</i> — drawing the roadmap; <i>tawfir maṣdar mā’ī mawthūq, ghayr taqlidī, wa-mustadām</i> — providing a reliable, non-traditional, and sustainable water source	Water supply, ESG governance, responsible resource use, future generations
Saudi Green Initiative English pages	English	a greener future and better quality of life; shaping the path to a sustainable future; fight against climate change; whole-of-society initiative; under the umbrella of the green initiatives	International climate-action framing, energy security, economic prosperity, quality of life
Saudi Water Authority English Vision 2030 page	English	water security management; integrated infrastructure planning for water supply; sustainability of water resources; ensuring the sustainability of water supply	Water security, infrastructure planning, demand management, supply continuity

4.3 Transliteration and translation protocol

Because the study addresses Saudi Arabic discourse directly, examples are not translated without trace. Each Arabic expression is presented in transliterated form and English translation. The transliteration is simplified and scholarly, designed for readability in discourse analysis. Long vowels are marked as ā, ī, and ū; emphatic and pharyngeal consonants are represented where analytically useful, for example ḥ, ḍ, ṭ, ṣ, and ʿ; and the hamzah is represented by ʾ when needed. The transliteration is not intended as a dialectal pronunciation guide. It represents written Modern Standard Arabic used in official Saudi discourse.

Translations are semantic rather than literary. For example, “sadd al-iḥtiyājāt” may literally mean “blocking,” “covering,” or “filling” needs, depending on context. The article translates it as “covering/filling needs” because both senses are important for metaphor analysis: need appears as a gap, deficit, or opening that must be filled or closed. Likewise, “miḏallah” is translated as “umbrella,” not merely “framework,” because the physical image of coverage is part of the metaphor.

4.4 Coding scheme

The analysis coded each expression for seven categories: language, policy domain, source domain, target domain, framing function, agency, and evaluative stance. Language distinguishes Arabic from English. Policy domain distinguishes environment, food, water, energy, governance, and general transformation. Source domain identifies the metaphorical source, such as JOURNEY, WAR, GREENING, SECURITY, FLOW, RESERVE, EARLY WARNING, UMBRELLA, INCLUSION/SOCIAL TOTALITY, or CONTAINER/GAP. Target domain identifies what the metaphor is about: climate action, sustainability, food supply, water supply, future generations, or governance. Framing function records which of Entman’s functions are performed. Agency records who is positioned as actor: state, initiative, government, private sector, society, future generations, or global community. Evaluative stance records the main value or tone: urgency, optimism, resilience, responsibility, pride, caution, or managerial confidence.

Multi-coding was allowed. This is necessary because a phrase such as “a greener future” activates both GREENING and FUTURE-AS-DESTINATION. A phrase such as “water security management” activates SECURITY, SYSTEM, and MANAGEMENT. The counts in Table 2 therefore refer to coding instances, not unique expressions.

Table 2. Codebook and observed coding instances in the selected sample

Metaphor family	Typical expressions	Target domain	Dominant framing function	Coding instances
Journey/path/road-map	journey, path, road-map, paving the way, moving toward	Sustainability, energy transition, water strategy, policy implementation	Defines transformation as movement and recommends planned progress	12
War/struggle/threat response	combat, fight, challenge, risk, responding to challenge	Climate action and environmental threat	Defines threat, diagnoses urgency, and recommends mobilization	7
Greening/growth/life	green future, green economy, make it green, quality of life	Environmental development and national future	Evaluates sustainability as renewal, prosperity, and life improvement	10
Security/protection	food security, water security, securing, safeguard, protect	Food, water, future generations, environment	Defines supply and environment as protection duties	13
Flow/system/reserve/warning	supply, integrated system, reserve, strategic storage, early warning	Food and water continuity	Diagnoses disruption risk and recommends system management	12

Metaphor family	Typical expressions	Target domain	Dominant framing function	Coding instances
Umbrella/inclusion/integration	under one umbrella, whole-of-society, integrated governance, inclusive approach	Governance and social agency	Recommends unified coordination and collective participation	8
Container/gap/scarcity	covering/filling needs, scarcity, limited resources	Needs, shortages, resource limits	Defines need as gap and provision as filling or covering	5

4.5 Procedure and trustworthiness

The procedure had five stages. First, all source pages were read to locate sections where sustainability and essential-needs supply were explicitly articulated. Second, metaphorically salient lexical units were identified using an adapted MIP-style process, the practical procedure described in Section 2.2: each lexical unit was read in context, compared with a more basic meaning, and then retained when the contextual meaning could be understood through comparison with that basic meaning (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). Third, expressions were coded for source domain and target domain. Fourth, the coding was linked to Entman's framing functions. Fifth, Arabic and English examples were compared for agency, temporality, and audience orientation.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through an audit trail rather than through inflated claims of statistical reliability. The article gives the data in tables, provides transliteration and translation, states the coding categories, and shows how interpretations are derived from the wording. Because this qualitative analysis does not report a separate multi-coder reliability test, it does not claim intercoder reliability. Its standard is analytic transparency: a reader can see the expression, the translation, the metaphor label, and the framing interpretation. The limitation is acknowledged: the sample is official and purposive. It does not include citizen responses, critical media, or large-scale social media discourse. Those would be important extensions.

5. Results

5.1 Overview: A metaphor system of governable transformation

The results show that Saudi sustainability and essential-needs supply discourse is structured by a system of mutually reinforcing metaphors. Environmental discourse gives the system its aspirational horizon: green future, sustainable tomorrow, energy transition, global climate action, quality of life, and protection of future generations. Supply discourse gives it its operational grammar: security, reliable provision, strategic storage, early warning, integrated governance, water-supply sustainability, and demand management. Together, these metaphors create a frame of governable transformation. The future is desirable, but it is not left to chance; it is mapped, secured, supplied, monitored, and coordinated.

The Arabic data are especially revealing because they foreground institutional agency through verbs of movement, preparation, unification, provision, protection, and securing. The English data often use globally legible climate language: green future, fight against climate change, whole-of-society initiative, energy security, economic prosperity, and sustainable future. The two languages are not contradictory. Rather, they address overlapping audiences. Arabic discourse more strongly emphasizes the Kingdom, national coordination, and public provision. English discourse more strongly places Saudi action in international climate and energy-security narratives.

Table 3. Transliterated Arabic expressions: translation, metaphor, and frame

Transliterated expression	English translation	Metaphor family	Framing effect
namdī bi-l-Mamlakah naḥwa al-ḥiqbah al- khaḍrā' al-qādimah	We move the Kingdom toward the coming green era.	Journey; future as des- tination; greening	Saudi Arabia is cast as a collective trav- eler entering a new historical stage.

Transliterated expression	English translation	Metaphor family	Framing effect
tumahhid al-Mamlakah al-ṭarīq nahwa ghadin akthar istidāmah	The Kingdom paves the way toward a more sustainable tomorrow.	Path; construction; future as destination	Saudi sustainability policy and national action are framed as purposeful preparation of the route to sustainability.
nahj istithmārī yashmal jamī' fi'āt al-mujtama'	An investment approach that includes all segments of society.	Whole society; inclusion; investment as route	Sustainability is framed as collective participation, not only state administration.
tawḥīd juhūd al-Mamlakah li-mukāfaḥat taghayyur al-munākh	Unifying the Kingdom's efforts to combat climate change.	War/struggle; coordination	Climate change becomes an adversary; unity becomes the recommended response.
tasrīf riḥlat intiqāl al-ṭāqah	Accelerating the journey of energy transition.	Journey; speed; managed transition	Energy transition is a process with pace and direction rather than a sudden rupture.
taḥta miḥallah wāḥidah	Under one umbrella.	Umbrella; protection; coordination	Multiple initiatives are framed as covered by a single coordinating structure.
ta'zīz al-iqtisād al-akhḍar	Enhancing/growing the green economy.	Greening; growth	Economic development is colored as ecological renewal and future opportunity.
li-naj'alhā khaḍrā'	Let us make it green.	Greening; collective action	The public is invited into environmental transformation as a shared task.
raf' mustawā jawdat al-ḥayāh wa-ḥimāyat al-bī'ah li-l-ajyāl al-qādimah	Raising quality of life and protecting the environment for future generations.	Protection; intergenerational duty; improvement	Environmental action is morally anchored in life quality and future responsibility.
ahdāf wāḍiḥah. ta'thīr malmūs	Clear goals. Tangible impact.	Measurability; materialization	Sustainability is framed as target-driven and empirically demonstrable.
sadd al-iḥtiyājāt min al-sila' al-ghidhā'iyyah	Covering/filling needs for food commodities.	Container/gap; provision	Need is a deficit to be filled; the supply institution becomes stabilizer.
al-ḥālāh al-mustaḥḥarrah	The stable condition.	Stability; equilibrium	Food security is framed through normality and continuity.
al-ḥālāh al-ṭāri'ah	The emergency condition.	Crisis; disruption	Food security is also framed as readiness for exceptional conditions.
al-ta'mīn al-sarīf wa-l-mawthūq li-sila' āminah wa-asāsiyyah	Rapid and reliable securing of safe and essential goods.	Security; speed; trust	Supply is protection; crisis response requires reliability and institutional capacity.
barnāmaj al-iḥtiyāṭī wa-l-khazn al-istirātījī li-l-agh-dhiyah	The program of food reserve and strategic storage.	Reserve; buffer; shield	Stored food becomes a protective buffer against future disruption.
nizām ḥawkamah mutakāmil li-l-tansīq bayn al-qitā'āt wa-l-jihāt dhāt al-'alāqah	An integrated governance system for coordination among sectors and relevant entities.	System; integration; coordination	Food security is framed as a cross-sectoral governance system.
nizām li-l-indhār al-mubakkir li-l-amn al-ghidhā'ī	An early-warning system for food security.	Warning; approaching danger; surveillance	Supply risk is imagined as detectable before crisis; management becomes anticipatory.
shuḥḥ wa-maḥdūdiyyat al-mawārid al-ṭabī'iyyah	Scarcity and limited natural resources.	Scarcity; bounded resource space	Resource pressure is defined as a structural condition requiring planning.
al-i'timād al-kabīr 'alā al-imdādāt al-ghidhā'iyyah al-mustawradah	Heavy dependence on imported food supplies.	Dependence; supply flow	Import reliance is framed as vulnerability in the flow of essentials.

Transliterated expression	English translation	Metaphor family	Framing effect
rasm khāriṭat al-ṭarīq	Drawing the roadmap.	Map; journey; planning	Water-sector sustainability is framed as planned navigation.
tawfīr maṣḍar māʾī mawthūq, ghayr taqlīdī, wa-mustadām	Providing a reliable, non-traditional, and sustainable water source.	Source; trust; sustainable supply	Water is framed as a dependable resource generated through innovation and management.
ḥimāyat al-bīʾah wa-l-istikhdām al-masʾūl li-l-mawārid al-ṭabīʿiyyah	Protecting the environment and responsible use of natural resources.	Protection; responsibility	Sustainability is morally framed as responsible stewardship.
mustaqbal afḍal wa-mustadām li-l-ajyāl al-qādīmah	A better and sustainable future for coming generations.	Future as destination; intergenerational duty	Environmental and water policy are morally anchored in life quality and responsibility toward future generations.
istidāmat imdādāt al-miyāh	Sustainability of water supply/provision.	Flow; continuity; system	Water security is understood as maintaining reliable provision and flow over time.

Table 4. English expressions and framing effects

English expression	Metaphor family	Framing effect
A greener future and better quality of life	Green future; life improvement	Sustainability is framed as a desirable social destination and as improvement in living conditions.
Shaping the path to a sustainable future	Path; construction; future destination	The future is not only reached but shaped; policy is purposeful route-making.
Fight against climate change	War/combat	Climate change is an adversary; response requires urgency and mobilization.
Whole-of-society initiative	Inclusion/social totality	Agency is distributed across government, private sector, stakeholders, and society through an inclusion frame.
Under the umbrella of the green initiatives	Umbrella/coordination	Multiple programs are placed under a single protective and organizing frame.
Energy security and economic prosperity must be treated equally	Security; equivalence/co-priority	Energy security and economic prosperity are framed as co-equal priorities rather than secondary considerations.
Safeguard future generations	Protection; guardianship	Sustainability is moralized as care for those who inherit the future.
Clear goals. Measurable impact.	Measurement/material impact	Policy is framed as accountable, target-driven, and observable.
Water security management	Security; management	Water is an object of strategic protection and regulation.
Integrated infrastructure planning for water supply	System/integration/flow	Water provision is framed as a planned technical system.
Ensuring the sustainability of water supply	Flow/continuity	The central problem is reliable continuation over time.
Clean and safe water	Purity/safety	Water provision is evaluated through health, trust, and service quality.

5.2 Sustainability as journey, path, and mapped transition

The most frequent environmental metaphor in the Arabic material is the journey/path frame. The Saudi Green Initiative headline “namḍī bi-l-Mamlakah naḥwa al-ḥiqbah al-khaḍrāʾ al-qādīmah” (we move the Kingdom toward the coming green era) (Saudi Green Initiative, n.d.-a) constructs the Kingdom as a collective traveler and the future as a destination. The expression is grammatically active: “we move” places national agency at the

center. The Kingdom is not waiting for the green era; it is moving toward it. The metaphor performs problem definition by casting the present as a transitional point and treatment recommendation by making forward motion the appropriate response.

The related Saudi Green Initiative phrase “*tumahhid al-Mamlakah al-ṭarīq nahwa ghadin akthar istidāmah*” (the Kingdom paves the way toward a more sustainable tomorrow) (Saudi Green Initiative, n.d.-a) adds a construction metaphor. A road can be found, followed, blocked, paved, or improved. Here, the Kingdom is not simply on a road; it prepares the road. The agency is stronger than in a passive journey frame. It suggests planning, engineering, investment, and public preparation. In Entman’s terms, the problem is not merely lack of desire for sustainability but the need to construct the route through which sustainability becomes possible.

Energy transition is framed in the same way through “*tasrī riḥlat intiqāl al-ṭāqah*” (accelerating the journey of energy transition). This expression is notable because it holds together two potentially conflicting values: change and continuity. A journey involves movement, but it also implies stages, direction, and manageable progress. In a country whose global identity is tied to energy production, this metaphor is discursively useful. It presents transition as planned movement rather than abrupt abandonment. It allows the discourse to acknowledge climate action while preserving an image of orderly national development.

The analyzed English discourse echoes this pattern in “shaping the path to a sustainable future” and “roadmap” language. The English phrase “shaping the path” is slightly different from the Arabic “paving the way.” “Shaping” emphasizes design and agency; “paving” emphasizes preparation and infrastructure. Both make sustainability spatial and navigable. They reduce complexity by giving the audience a route image. This is not a weakness; it is how complex policy becomes communicable. Yet the route metaphor also narrows the question. It encourages debate about speed, milestones, and implementation, while making deeper contestation over the destination less visible.

5.3 Climate action as struggle and threat response

The second cluster frames climate action as struggle. The transliterated Arabic expression “*tawḥīd juhūd al-Mamlakah li-mukāfaḥat taghayyur al-munākh*” (unifying the Kingdom’s efforts to combat climate change) contains two important metaphors. First, “*mukāfaḥat*” (combat/struggle) positions climate change as a hostile pressure. Second, “*tawḥīd juhūd*” (unifying efforts) positions the response as coordinated action. The problem is not only climate change; it is also the need to bring separate efforts into one organized response.

The English phrase “fight against climate change” operates similarly. Experimental research by Flusberg et al. (2017) found that war metaphors for climate change can increase perceived urgency and risk relative to race metaphors. This finding does not prove the effect of any particular Saudi phrase on any particular Saudi audience, but it supports the broader premise that metaphorical framing can shape how environmental risk is understood. In the Saudi sample, the combat metaphor is not used alone. It is embedded in institutional language about initiatives, goals, economy, energy transition, and whole-of-society involvement. The result is not a purely militarized discourse but a managed mobilization frame.

The strength of struggle metaphors is moral clarity: they can make delay appear dangerous and coordination appear necessary. This interpretation is consistent with research on war metaphors and climate narratives, although such effects should still be treated cautiously because audience response depends on context, culture, and prior attitudes (Fløttum & Gjerstad, 2017; Flusberg et al., 2017). Their weakness is that they can externalize climate change as an enemy “out there,” rather than a condition produced through energy systems, industrial development, consumption, and global political economy. This is why the struggle frame needs to be read alongside the journey and governance frames. Together, they produce urgency without losing administrative order.

5.4 Greening, growth, and quality of life

Greening is among the most condensed and emotionally attractive metaphor families in the corpus. In the Saudi context, it also carries a national resonance because the national flag is green and is officially associated with national identity, unity, historical roots, cultural heritage, growth, prosperity, solidarity, and national bond (Saudi Flag, n.d.). “*al-Sa’ūdiyyah al-Khaḍrā*” (Saudi Green) is therefore not only a name. It can work simultaneously as an ecological image and a nationalizing play on color. It brings together vegetation, ecological recovery, renewal, national branding, and developmental optimism. The campaign phrase “*li-naj’ alhā khaḍrā*”

(let us make it green) is especially important because it turns greening into an imperative of collective action. The pronoun “us” invites participation, while “green” compresses a wide range of environmental and national values into a simple visual image.

The phrase “ta’zīz al-iqtisād al-akhḍar” (enhancing/growing the green economy) maps greening onto economic transformation. In this Saudi context, “green economy” can also be read as more than a technical environmental-economic term: because greenness is attached to the national flag and to the Saudi Green Initiative, it can invite readers to align economic modernization with national environmental duty. This frame is persuasive because it refuses a simple opposition between development and environment. Sustainability becomes compatible with investment, innovation, and prosperity. The analyzed English discourse similarly links “a greener future” with “better quality of life.” The result is a moral, national, and developmental story: green transformation is not sacrifice alone; it is a route to better living and future well-being.

The greening frame, however, must be handled critically. Green is a powerful adjective precisely because it is broad. It can refer to afforestation, emissions reduction, renewable energy, environmental protection, public health, economic diversification, or place branding. The breadth gives the discourse flexibility, but it also creates the risk of vagueness. A critical discourse analysis must therefore ask what specific ecological relations are being named and which remain unmentioned. Greening is a frame of hope; it is not, by itself, proof of ecological sufficiency.

5.5 Food and water as security, protection, and intergenerational duty

The strongest bridge between sustainability and essential-needs supply is the security metaphor. Terms such as “al-amn al-ghidhā’ī” (food security) and “al-amn al-mā’ī” (water security) are conventional policy terms, but their metaphorical force should not be overlooked. Security language shifts food and water from ordinary consumption into the field of collective protection. Supply failure becomes a threat to social stability, while provision becomes a duty of governance.

The General Food Security Authority’s distinction between “al-ḥālah al-mustaqirrah” (the stable condition) and “al-ḥālah al-tāri’ah” (the emergency condition) structures food security as a temporal frame rather than a single administrative label. It separates food provision into two linked scenarios. In stable times, the goal is “tawfīr ghidhā’ āmin wa-mughadhi li-l-jamī” (providing safe and nutritious food for all). In emergencies, the goal is “al-ta’mīn al-sarī’ wa-l-mawthūq li-silā’ āminah wa-asāsiyyah” (rapid and reliable securing of safe and essential goods). The missing link between the two conditions is continuity: ordinary provision must be maintained, while crisis mechanisms must be ready when regular supply is threatened. This contrast frames food security as both everyday stability and emergency preparedness.

Water discourse uses the same moral grammar. The Saudi Water Authority’s Arabic expression “tawfīr maṣdar mā’ī mawthūq, ghayr taqlīdī, wa-mustadām” (providing a reliable, non-traditional, and sustainable water source) combines trust, innovation, and sustainability. The wider phrase “ḥimāyat al-bī’ah wa-l-istikhdām al-mas’ūl li-l-mawārid al-ṭabī’iyyah” (protecting the environment and responsible use of natural resources) frames water-sector planning as stewardship. The future is not simply a date; it is an ethical horizon, as shown in “mustaqbal afḍal wa-mustadām li-l-ajyāl al-qādimah” (a better and sustainable future for coming generations).

5.6 Supply as flow, reserve, system, and early warning

Essential-needs supply discourse is built around system and flow. The words “supply” and “imḍādāt” (supplies/flows of provision) imagine goods and water as moving through channels. A functioning system keeps the flow continuous; a crisis interrupts it. The Saudi Water Authority’s English expressions “integrated infrastructure planning for water supply” and “ensuring the sustainability of water supply” are therefore not metaphor-free technicalities. They frame water as a managed flow whose reliability depends on infrastructure, integration, and demand management.

Food-security discourse adds reserve and early-warning metaphors. “barnāmaj al-iḥtiyā’ī wa-l-khazn al-istirātījī li-l-aghdiyyah” (the program of food reserve and strategic storage) frames stored commodities as a protective buffer. The reserve is not merely inventory. It is a shield against the unknown. “niḡām li-l-indhār al-mubakkir li-l-amn al-ghidhā’ī” (an early-warning system for food security) frames supply disruption as approaching danger that can be detected before it arrives. The recommended response is information, surveillance, anticipation, and rapid institutional action.

This cluster is where the discourse becomes most operational. The green-future frame says where the country is going; the supply-system frame says how life is to be protected while moving there. The General Food Security Authority also names vulnerabilities, including “shuḥḥ wa-maḥdūdiyyat al-mawārid al-ṭabī‘iyyah” (scarcity and limited natural resources) and “al-i’timād al-kabīr ‘alā al-imdādāt al-ghidhā’iyyah al-mustawradah” (heavy dependence on imported food supplies). These expressions complicate a purely celebratory reading. The official discourse itself recognizes scarcity and dependence, but it frames the response through governance, reserves, information systems, and strategic planning.

5.7 Governance as umbrella, inclusion, and coordinated agency

A final cluster concerns agency. The expression “taḥta miḥallah wāḥidah” (under one umbrella) frames governance as a structure of coverage. The umbrella protects, gathers, and organizes. It does not erase the existence of different sectors or actors; rather, it places them under one visible frame. The English expression “under the umbrella of the green initiatives” carries the same metaphor. It gives institutional coherence to an otherwise complex field of emissions reduction, renewable energy, tree planting, land restoration, conservation, innovation, and international climate cooperation.

The English expression “whole-of-society initiative” and the Arabic phrase “nahj... yashmal jamī‘ fi’āt al-mujtama’” (an approach that includes all segments of society) expand agency beyond ministries alone. Society becomes a field of inclusion and participation rather than a merely administrative audience. Yet the discourse still remains strongly coordinated. The General Food Security Authority’s “nizām ḥawkamah mutakāmil li-l-tansīq bayn al-qitā‘āt wa-l-jihāt dhāt al-‘alāqah” (an integrated governance system for coordination among sectors and relevant entities) is not a grassroots frame; it is a cross-sectoral institutional frame. Participation exists, but it is participation within a coordinated architecture.

This matters for the political meaning of sustainability. The discourse distributes responsibility, but it does not decentralize the frame. The state, official initiatives, authorities, private sector, and stakeholders are organized around clear goals, roadmaps, and national transformation. The result is a language of disciplined collectivity: many actors, one umbrella; many initiatives, one future; many supply risks, one governance system.

5.8 Arabic-English comparison

Arabic and English discourse share the same broad metaphor families, but they differ in emphasis. Arabic discourse more often names the Kingdom directly as actor: “namḍi bi-l-Mamlakah” (we move the Kingdom), “tumahhid al-Mamlakah al-ṭarīq” (the Kingdom paves the way), and “tawḥīd juhūd al-Mamlakah” (unifying the Kingdom’s efforts). This gives Arabic discourse a national and institutional rhythm. Verbs of action are prominent: move, pave, unify, accelerate, enhance, provide, secure, protect, draw, and coordinate.

English discourse more often embeds Saudi action within globally recognized climate and development vocabulary: greener future, sustainable future, fight against climate change, energy security, economic prosperity, whole-of-society initiative, climate collaboration, global energy producer, and safeguard future generations. This orientation does not make the English discourse less national, but it makes the national project legible to international audiences. It positions Saudi Arabia not only as a domestic policy actor but also as a participant in global climate governance and energy-security debates.

The comparison therefore suggests audience adaptation rather than simple translation. Arabic discourse foregrounds provision, national responsibility, and coordinated agency. English discourse foregrounds international credibility, climate action, innovation, and balance between environmental protection, energy transition, and prosperity. The same metaphor system travels across languages, but it is tuned differently.

6. Discussion

6.1 The discursive architecture of sustainability

The findings show that Saudi sustainability discourse is not a loose collection of slogans. It is an architecture. The journey frame gives direction, the greening frame gives value, the struggle frame gives urgency, the umbrella frame gives coordination, the security frame gives protection, the flow frame gives operational continuity, and the reserve/warning frame gives preparedness. Together, they create a discourse in which sustainability is not simply about caring for nature. It is about national movement, public provision, future planning, and the management of vulnerability.

This architecture resonates with the action-oriented tendencies observed in Saudi sustainability discourse by Almaghlouth (2022) and with Hameed et al.'s (2022) finding that media representations of the Saudi Green Initiative emphasize ambition, ecological benefit, goals, carbon reduction, and green transformation. The present study adds that these themes are held together metaphorically. "Action" becomes movement, "goals" become a roadmap, "environmental benefit" becomes greening, "climate risk" becomes combat, and "resilience" becomes security and reserve capacity.

The article also shows why essential-needs supply belongs in sustainability discourse. Food and water are not peripheral administrative concerns. They are the points at which sustainability becomes materially intimate. People may encounter climate action abstractly, but they encounter water supply, food prices, safe commodities, and crisis preparedness directly. By framing food and water through security, flow, reserve, warning, and integrated governance, Saudi discourse ties the ecological future to the everyday conditions of life.

6.2 What the dominant metaphors make visible

The dominant metaphors make several important realities visible. First, they make future orientation visible. Phrases such as "green era," "sustainable tomorrow," "future generations," and "sustainable future" pull attention forward. They make environmental policy a matter of legacy, not only present administration. Second, they make coordination visible. Umbrella, whole-of-society, integrated governance, and roadmap expressions portray sustainability as cross-sectoral action. Third, they make risk visible. Food security, water security, emergency condition, strategic storage, and early warning acknowledge that supply is vulnerable and must be protected.

Fourth, the metaphors make measurability visible. This claim is based on the sampled expressions themselves, including "Clear goals," "tangible impact," "measurable impact," "roadmap," "targets," and "system" language in the Saudi Green Initiative and Saudi Water Authority materials (Saudi Green Initiative, n.d.-c; Saudi Water Authority, n.d.-b). Such wording suggests that sustainability can be planned, monitored, and assessed. This is a notable feature of institutional discourse: it translates moral commitments into measurable programs. Fifth, the metaphors make moral responsibility visible. Protection of future generations and responsible resource use provide an ethical frame that goes beyond technical efficiency. The discourse asks audiences to see sustainability as care for those who will inherit the consequences of current action.

6.3 What the dominant metaphors background

The same metaphors also background important questions. Journey metaphors make transformation appear orderly, but they can hide disagreement about the route. Who pays the cost of transition? Which sectors change first? What happens if economic goals and ecological limits clash? The route image can make these conflicts appear as implementation details rather than political choices.

War metaphors generate urgency, but they risk simplifying climate change as an external enemy. Climate change is not only an adversary to be fought; it is also entangled with patterns of production, energy use, consumption, urban design, water demand, and global economic structures. A combat frame can encourage mobilization, but it may discourage slower and less heroic forms of change such as conservation, public deliberation, demand reduction, and everyday behavioral adjustment.

Greening metaphors produce optimism, but they can blur the difference between ecological substance and environmental branding. A "green economy" may include renewable investment and ecological restoration, but the adjective green can also become a general mark of approval. Critical discourse analysis should therefore ask what material changes the metaphor names and what metrics are used to evaluate them.

Security metaphors are particularly powerful in the food and water domains. They justify preparedness, monitoring, and strong coordination. Yet they can also narrow debate by presenting supply primarily as a stability problem. Food security is also a question of nutrition, waste, diet, agricultural practice, trade ethics, and environmental impact. Water security is also a question of demand restraint, desalination energy, ecological footprint, pricing, and public habits. A security frame should not crowd out those dimensions.

Umbrella metaphors create unity, but they can screen tension. Environmental protection, energy production, economic prosperity, water-intensive development, and supply continuity are not always harmonious. The discourse often treats them as equal and integrated, which is rhetorically effective. A more deliberative public discourse would also name the tradeoffs and show how they are negotiated.

6.4 Implications for policy communication and discourse analysis

For policy communication, the implication is not that journey, greening, security, or umbrella metaphors should be abandoned. They are clear, memorable, and institutionally useful. The implication is that they should be complemented by frames that make accountability, ecological limits, demand management, and public participation more visible. For example, food-security communication could pair strategic reserve metaphors with waste-reduction metaphors. Water-security communication could pair supply-continuity frames with conservation and demand-restraint frames. Green-future communication could pair optimism with transparent discussion of tradeoffs.

For discourse analysis, the implication is methodological. The study demonstrates that close analysis of Arabic wording is indispensable. A study based only on English would miss the force of verbs such as “*namḍī*” (we move), “*tumahhid*” (paves), “*tawḥīd*” (unifying), “*mukāfaḥah*” (combat), “*sadd*” (covering/filling), “*al-ta’mīn*” (securing), and “*tawfīr*” (providing). These verbs create a style of active provision and managed transformation. They are not merely local equivalents of English phrases; they reveal how agency is staged in Arabic official discourse.

The study also illustrates the value of connecting metaphor analysis to framing functions. Listing metaphors is not enough. The analyst must ask what each metaphor does. Does it define the problem? Does it diagnose a cause? Does it attach moral value? Does it recommend a treatment? Only then can metaphor analysis move from stylistic description to discourse analysis.

7. Conclusion

This article has offered a qualitative empirical discourse analysis of metaphors of sustainable environment and essential-needs supply in Saudi Arabia. It has shown that official Saudi Arabic and English discourses repeatedly frame sustainability as a journey toward a green future, climate action as struggle, governance as an umbrella, and food and water supply as security, flow, reserve, system, and early-warning preparedness. These metaphors do not operate separately. They form a coherent frame in which national transformation is future-oriented, coordinated, measurable, protective, and materially grounded in essential needs.

The transliterated Arabic examples are central to the findings. Expressions such as “*namḍī bi-l-Mamlakah naḥwa al-ḥiqbah al-khaḍrā’ al-qādimah*” (we move the Kingdom toward the coming green era), “*tumahhid al-Mamlakah al-ṭarīq naḥwa ghadin akthar istidāmah*” (the Kingdom paves the way toward a more sustainable tomorrow), “*tawḥīd juhūd al-Mamlakah li-mukāfaḥat taghayyur al-munākh*” (unifying the Kingdom’s efforts to combat climate change), “*sadd al-iḥtiyājāt min al-sila’ al-ghidhā’iyyah*” (covering/filling needs for food commodities), and “*nizām li-l-indhār al-mubakkir li-l-amn al-ghidhā’ī*” (an early-warning system for food security) show how the discourse constructs agency, urgency, provision, and preparedness.

The English examples communicate the same broad metaphor system, but they do so through different emphases for international audiences: “a greener future,” “shaping the path to a sustainable future,” “fight against climate change,” “whole-of-society initiative,” “under the umbrella of the green initiatives,” and “water security management.” The bilingual comparison therefore suggests both continuity and difference. The continuity lies in the shared metaphor families of journey, greening, struggle, security, umbrella, system, and continuity. The difference lies in audience orientation: Arabic discourse emphasizes national agency, provision, and coordination; English discourse emphasizes international legibility, climate collaboration, energy security, and quality of life.

The broader conclusion is that metaphor is a central mechanism through which sustainability becomes publicly intelligible. It tells audiences what the problem is, who should act, what values matter, and what solutions appear reasonable. In the Saudi case, the dominant answer is coordinated national action for a greener and more secure future. The critical task is not to dismiss this frame, but to read it carefully: to appreciate its coherence and mobilizing power while also asking what tradeoffs, limits, and alternative forms of participation it leaves in the background. Future research can extend this article by building a larger bilingual corpus, comparing official discourse with citizen responses on X and other platforms, and experimentally testing how Saudi audiences respond to journey, security, greening, and conservation frames.

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