The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) launched the 2019 Arab Watch Report on the Right to Food, which explores from a comparative perspective the political food economy in the Arab region as well as alternative models of food systems, such as the right to food, food justice, food security, food sovereignty and their potential implications in the region. The report includes 10 case studies from the region that serve as a comprehensive set of national reports covering half of the Arab countries: Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria.

The right to food is one of the basic human rights enshrined in international conventions and instruments as it is linked to human life, living conditions, dignity and physical and mental health. The concept of food sovereignty originated in the mid-1990s to propose the right of all individuals to adequate, healthy and safe nutrition that is compatible with their food and health habits and traditions, while maintaining sustainable production and consumption patterns. Moreover, it is utterly important to preserve the environment and not deplete the natural resources and wealth that are the right of future generations.

Arab countries suffer from undernourishment and lack of food, primarily because of the food, economic and social policies that have been adopted, which led to changing the patterns of production and consumption of food, including changing the patterns of food towards imported products, and secondly as a result of wars and conflicts. As such, the FAO estimates that the number of undernourished people in conflict and crises in the Arab countries has doubled dramatically, from 16.5 million to 33 million between 1990 and 2016. The level of undernourishment in conflict countries, particularly in Sudan, Syria and Yemen, is six times greater than in other countries.

The concept of food sovereignty has been a struggle for agricultural and civil society organizations, which perceive that the technical and fragmented definition of the “food sovereignty” concept fails to provide an analytical and practical framework to address food problems at the international and national levels, as well as on the household and individual levels. And therefore, “food sovereignty” aims to link between the technical objective as stated to the macro and sectoral policies that allow the realization of the right to food for all, from a sustainable development and human rights perspective to ultimately achieve “food security”. “Food sovereignty” is thus the way and means for achieving “food safety” and “the right to food”.

Food crisis in the Arab region

The food crises in the region are due to the failure of the neoliberal policies and strategies adopted by donors and implemented by the governments in the region, whether military, monarchy, sectarian or occupying forces.

The current food crisis not only deprives people of the right to food, but comes instead to the benefit of a few transnational corporations and local elites that monopolize the entire food chain. This has resulted in narrowing choices for farmers (who have become economically and socially marginalized) and consumers, changing national food patterns to replace them with new ones more appropriate to discharge the products of exporters, and harming individuals’ health and the national economies. In parallel, globalization and market dominance by multinational corporations have also increased food
dependency and promoted patterns of production that reduce the capacity to achieve food sovereignty and consequently shift towards an export-oriented production.

**Key messages**

Accordingly, we call for the convergence of rural and urban movements, protection of the rights of the marginalized, unmasking of the adopted food trade policies, prioritizing the regional integration among Arab countries, combating monopolistic power, establishing and unifying farmers' cooperatives, prioritizing the local market, ending GMO products, managing the public sector, prioritizing the ecological agriculture, and more importantly, recognizing the fact that only small-scale farmers are the gatekeepers of the alternative diet in the region and hence should be at the core of any developmental, transitional, and/or post-conflict economic inclusion plan.