



Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda

Beirut, 14 March 2013

Discussion Paper

Introduction

The Arab Regional Consultation on the post-2015 development agenda will provide an opportunity to gather the views of civil society coalitions and key UN agencies the region. The outcome of the regional consultation will be presented at a meeting of the *High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post 2015 Development Agenda*, which will be held in Indonesia in March 2013. It will also be discussed at the 18th session Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for the Arab States, to be held in Beirut on 15 March 2013, back-to-back with the regional consultation.

The main objective of the Arab Regional Consultation will be to identify the potential roles that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) could play in providing priorities in the post-2015 development agenda. The regional consultation will be built around two sessions and two main objectives: (i) to identify civil society perspectives on regional priorities for the post-2015 agenda; (ii) to identify ways in which civil society in the region can contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda; and (iii) to identify ways through which civil society can coordinate with the UN for the implementation of the Post-2015 agenda.

Arab Civil Society Contribution to the Post 2015 development agenda

This discussion paper is designed to guide the discussions of the second session of the regional consultation. The session is ultimately aimed to assess the challenges that civil society in Arab countries face in upholding participatory development and the role that they can play in the formulation of policy options for the post 2015 development agenda. The session will also attempt to build on good experiences of civil society in different parts of the region, in an effort to identify existing good practices and lessons learned.



Most civil society reports and contributions to the post-2015 process focus on the central importance human rights and social justice in the future development agenda, in addition to taking into consideration such global issues as climate change, economic slowdown, increasing poverty and, in case of the Arab region, the recent uprisings and subsequent regime changes. Civil society is thus expected to contribute its own assessment of what has worked well and what has not in terms of the MDGs process and actual benchmarks of progress, and to advance innovative thinking based on social justice and human rights to the post-2015 process.

The period leading up to the 68th General Assembly in September 2013 – when the Secretary-General is expected to present his vision on post-2015 development – offers Arab civil society several opportunities to engage and make its voice heard with a wide range of stakeholders at national, regional and global levels and to make an effective contributions ongoing post-2015 global processes.

Civil Society: Roles and Challenges

Arab civil society faces the daunting task of developing new thinking and contributing to the post-2015 development framework and at the same time navigate a climate of political uncertainty, economic instability and social upheaval. As evidenced in the last decade, development thinking cannot be made in isolation of inclusive economic development, social policy and political contexts that guarantee rights, freedoms and social justice.

The double burden of demanding the reduction of inequalities and unemployment on one hand, and advocating a new system of governance on the other is unenviable particularly in a region that is undergoing dramatic political transition. An important task for CSOs today is to draw lessons from the MDGs based on local contexts and examine prevailing assumptions behind economic development paradigms focused primarily on growth. Some regional networks, including ANND, have already started doing that and even went as far as calling for a paradigm shift in development thinking to go with the aspirations of the people that took to the streets in protests.

In recent civil society forums in the region, Arab CSO networks called for a holistic development model that introduces new and innovative development goals, ensures built-in mechanisms for success and necessary tools for implementation. This would stave off the likeliness of failing to meet development goals as has happened with the MDGs. The failure of economic choices that



led to the uprisings in the region is largely predicated – from civil society points of view – on the emphasis on growth at the expense of development objectives and peoples’ economic and social rights.

Specifically, civil society is expected to develop and put forward an intelligent and effective mechanism of participation that brings together key development actors at national levels. This would come with an equally important system of monitoring and accountability for the impending development agenda. Such a mechanism would need to be based on mutual respect, openness and substantive consultations, particularly between governments and CSOs, and would need to involve underutilized – yet vital – actors such as the private sector, labor unions and international partners, including donor agencies. While the post-2015 consultations are underway, civil society needs to act quickly to ensure timely and meaningful contribution to this process. This has to go beyond mere consultations to ensuring that demands, diverse voices and substantive thinking by civil society will eventually find their way to the post-2015 process.

Arab civil society sees that the post-2015 ‘development framework’ should respect developing country specificities by advancing the right development paradigm - with macro and micro tools for implementation – that is not based solely on economic liberalization and international integration, rather on enhancing development based on human rights.

Civil society in the Arab region continues to wage an uphill battle to anchor itself as an equal partner to governments and to ensure that gains reaped during periods of protests are not wasted. The post-2015 process cannot be seen in isolation of this ongoing reality which will undoubtedly shape the development models and policies of countries concerned. Since human rights and social justice remain the main focus of any future development agenda, civil society needs to continue – if not intensify – its advocacy at the national levels to demand implementation of existing human rights agreements and a commitment to uphold citizens’ inalienable rights. The strong demands for greater participation in the formulation of a new social contract and development model in the region should also be grounded on the expansion of freedoms and social justice.

While the Arab region has its own peculiarities, civil society cannot act in isolation of like-minded movements around the globe. To increase effectiveness, Arab civil society needs to



develop a multiple approach that has the potential of impacting the post-2015 process by engaging effectively with national governments and, as it has already happened in two meetings, with the High level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) appointed by the Secretary-General in July 2012.¹ But it is imperative that CSOs use precious chances to engage with both global and regional consultations on the post-2015 agenda to convey the potential roles that civil society could play in providing key priorities that respond to new regional realities, as opposed to too many demands.

In this respect, Arab civil society perceives that the post 2015 development framework should go beyond the five priority areas designated by the UNTT to include the following: (1) Macroeconomic Policies, (2) Productive Sectors, (3) Terms of integration for developing countries in the global economy (trade and investment regimes); and (4) Economic ownership.

In addition, CSOs in the region can benefit by joining global civil society coalitions; developing position papers and key messages; influencing thematic consultations through their advisory groups, e-consultations and direct meetings in other world regions; and engage in national consultations through select UN agencies. At the same time, CSOs in the region need to organize their own consultations and form their own coalitions and networks and contribute to consultations at national and local levels. Such networks would involve key actors such as the private sector, labor unions and local authorities, some of which are often ignored during similar consultation processes. Concomitant with this, civil society needs to develop a communication and outreach plan for the post-2015 development agenda that reaches ordinary citizens and solicits the input of otherwise untapped parts of the population, particularly youth and university students.

Having an effective civil society contribution to the post-2015 process in countries that experienced change recently will be both challenging and yet critical to bring their country experiences to the ongoing global and regional debate. In these countries civil society is already embroiled in the difficult task of negotiating a new political order based on a renewed social

¹ The HLP is co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia; President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia; and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom. It is composed of 23 other members, including two eminent persons from the ESCWA region: HM Queen Rania of Jordan and Ms Tawakel Karman (co-reipient of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize) of Yemen. Selected CSOs have already had a chance to engage the HLP in two meetings held in London and Monrovia over the past few months.



contract anchored in sound constitutionalism, democratic institutions, social justice freedom and human rights. This is being done against the backdrop of increasing violence and insecurity, rising extremism, frustrated citizenry and fatigue from a transition period that has barely begun. It is also undermined by difficult short-term economic outlooks in transition countries and thus few socio-economic benefits in the short run. Critically, the Arab region is also host to the last remaining military occupation in the 21st century and the consequent fallouts of apartheid colonial policies. This reality makes it incumbent on civil society in Arab countries to double its efforts and unite its various contributions to offer substantive input to the post-2015 process and the necessary development goals vital for this region.

Expected outcomes of the regional consultation

ESCWA proposes to facilitate a process of participatory consultation that brings together various key players in the post-2015 process. ESCWA will utilize its long established participatory development framework sound expertise to design a consultation process that goes beyond a mere discussion of development issues to include long-term commitment toward genuine participation and meaningful exchanges.

Ultimately, the regional consultation is designed to agree on a focused message with clear priorities, rather than a broad wish list, in order to ensure maximal impact on the deliberations of the High Level Panel. In the process, it is also envisaged that the consultation will offer a platform for discussing ways in which civil society could further engage in the ongoing debate on the post-2015 development agenda.