

## **Concluding Recommendations of Civil Society Organizations Arab Regional Consultation on the Post-2015 Agenda**

Beirut, 30 April 2015

### **Alternative Development Strategies for Post-2015: Exit from the Current Policy Approach**

#### **I. Introduction**

The international community adopted the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the beginning of the new century and set the deadline for their achievement by year 2015. The MDGs became the key reference for the international development agenda, setting specific, agreed upon, and measurable objectives focusing on the reduction of poverty and hunger, ensuring universal education, promoting gender equality, reducing child and maternal mortality, and so on.

The goals were directed to developing countries in particular, with only one goal (Goal VIII) related to the principle of joint international cooperation to achieve the remaining seven goals. It focused on a global partnership for development, aimed at promoting a fair and regulated trade and financial system, to meet the needs of least developed countries and address the question of debt in developing countries.

With the onset of the new millennium, however, the global economy was hit by several acute and multidimensional crises. Poverty, inequality, and hunger continued to spread. Risks and insecurity levels grew on a global scale, added to concerns regarding the future supply of basic goods like water and energy, the threat of climate change, demographic pressures resulting from growing populations, especially in the old age, and the rapid fluctuations in the balances of power in the global economy. On the global level, these challenges were closely tied to the promotion of the free economy and integrated markets, along with weak global governance and the absence of fair distribution mechanisms in the global public interest. This brought about more crises, which international development tracks failed to address or even predict.

The recent global financial crisis (2008-2009), with its tremendous repercussions on the global economy, revealed the systemic deficiencies at the heart of the international economic and social policies and the absence of any form of social justice. The financial

crisis came in parallel with various other crises, including the soaring and volatile global prices of food and energy, in addition to persisting challenges related to climate change.

## **II. Where Did the MDGs Fail?**

The establishment of an MDGs agenda contributed to several achievements and some progress, especially in terms of allocating resources to combat poverty and foster – albeit timidly – the spirit of global partnership involving all stakeholders. However, the MDGs did not attain the results expected by 2015, which raised questions regarding whether the current model could achieve sustainable development, including for future generations.

The MDGs were drafted based on very limited consultations and through a vague process. They resulted from discussions prioritizing expert technical opinion, in the almost complete absence of social participation towards a rights-based development agenda and with the failure to adopt social justice as a priority objective. The development agenda was thus simplified and established with a clear focus on eradicating various forms of extreme poverty. This was at the expense of other equally important development goals, such as fighting inequality and discrimination, participation and social justice, political freedoms, and so on. The goals were limited to addressing the symptoms, without going into the actual causes.

The absence of tools and mechanisms to achieve the desired objectives was another obstacle in the framework of the MDGs. It contributed to focusing policy efforts on improving social services provision (education, health, etc.), at the expense of other developmental priorities, such as diversifying production, building productive capacities, and creating decent work opportunities. This is in addition to its impact on the distributive effects of macroeconomic policies, the fair and sustainable management of natural resources, and to building a balanced global governance.

Furthermore, despite being common global goals under the supervision of the international community, in reality, the MDGs became a set of "one-size-fits-all" objectives. Each country was expected to pursue the same global goals, regardless of national developmental needs or the initial conditions in each country. Thus, the goals seemed to be biased towards the poorest countries.

On the other hand, progress on Goal 8 to develop a global partnership for development remained extremely limited, due to the lack of specific commitments for developed countries in the MDGs agenda. More precisely, targets for the promotion of the global partnership were not carefully set, which led to a weak accountability process for international aid. Many international commitments remained ink on paper.

## **III. Arab Region: Challenges and Prospects**

The Arab Region has fallen into a spiral of conflicts directly affecting the transformations it witnesses, as traditional and conservative forces cling to their interests in the face of the

great desire of the people to achieve progress, justice, and solidly-grounded citizenship and democracy. The spreading violence turned into armed conflicts in several countries and into an obstacle to achieving the tasks of the Arab Spring, which erupted in protest of the lack of public and private freedoms, social justice, and human dignity, and against rampant corruption.

A range of global challenges – economic, social, and political – continue to face the Arab Region. In particular, these challenges are found in the persistent geographic, factional, and social disparities, in the breakdown of food security and worsening environmental problems, in the spread of violence and conflict, in the rampant corruption and growing crony capitalism, and in the weakness of the state and the absence of the rule of law, as a result of decades of "structural adjustment" policies and austerity measures. This is added to many challenges related to unemployment, poverty, social marginalization, growing extremism and terrorist movements, worsening immigration, aging, and lack of freedoms, not to mention the Israeli occupation of Palestine and entailed economic, security, and social barriers in the region.

Countries in the region have failed to confront these challenges, owing to the nature of the dominant global neoliberal model and the entailed continuous restructuring of the global economic and social order. Another factor on the economic, social, and political levels is the rentier nature of the state in the region. On one hand, it is still based on unproductive economies, with the absence of wealth redistribution mechanisms and social protection systems. On the other hand, this contributes to disabling freedoms and the domestication and control of civil society and trade union organizations, not to mention the rampant financial and administrative corruption in government institutions in the absence of accountability mechanisms and the lack of participation by stakeholders in implementation.

A comprehensive vision for the future of the region and the world as a whole is needed in this context. It should be founded on a range of economic, social, humanitarian, and environmental principles within an integrated and homogeneous framework, based on the principles of human rights and linking between environmental sustainability, integrated economic development, human security, and integrated social development. As a whole, it should aspire to achieve a better future for all. Standing on the principles of social justice, it should be based on equality, sustainability, equity, participation, and human rights. This also entails setting the foundations of a democratic civil developmental state, built on a new social contract between citizens and the state, based on the principles of human rights, participation, citizenship, transparency, and accountability.

#### **IV. Alternative Strategies and Proposed Frameworks for the Post-2015 Agenda**

- The Post-2015 Agenda should be based on a new development framework, incorporating more progressive policies in line with international principles of human rights, to meet the global challenges to development, likely to result from existing policies and strategies, and to safeguard the economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights of citizens all over the world.

- The search for a more stable and fairer model should be based on the critical assessment of past development experiences and must determine the underlying causes of the growing phenomena being faced. It should conclude with identifying new measures to respond to the new challenges resulting from the interconnected crises suffered by our world since the beginning of the millennium.
- Any future vision of development in the post-2015 framework clearly requires a global responsibility to affect change in developed and developing countries alike, which includes altering global consumption and production patterns, as well as national and international regulatory frameworks. It should contribute to determining more coherent, equitable and sustainable economic, social, and environmental policy responses, in addition to promoting more representative structures of global governance.
- The debate must shift from the mere focus on identifying new post-2015 goals and objectives into analyzing the key issues and means of implementation. In this context, there should be a shift from thinking about new sets of numerical targets, into designing goals and objectives that could deal with the various critical conditions and the diverse enabling environments.
- A successful post-2015 development strategy is not limited to adequate policy design. It requires wide social support as a common social project for change and progress. In all successful cases, the state retained a key and active role in directing and managing the process of change, correcting market deficiencies, improving overall dynamic efficiencies, and protecting human rights. In this regard, the Post-2015 Development Framework should recognize **the vital and active role of the state, side by side with other development actors to respond to the multiple crises shaking the global economy**. In turn, this requires maintaining general cohesion so as to avoid dispensing with one advantage for the sake another and where tools and policies adopted to solve one crisis do not lead to aggravating the impact of other crises.
- The Post-2015 Development Framework should incorporate **effective strategies combining short-term achievements with the long-term sustainability of development**, through the adoption of measures and policies aimed to confront cyclical imbalances, create sustainable foundations for growth and development, reduce distributional tensions, and alleviate environmental costs.
- The Post-2015 Development Framework should incorporate a clear strategy to improve well-being in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner. A cornerstone of this strategy is to press **towards effective manufacturing policies, along with environmental and energy regulations, for low-carbon growth**. The majority of successful development experiences had aimed to diversify production and move away from rentierism. The strategies of these economic transformations

were built on supporting economic diversification, through macroeconomic policies and active manufacturing. This included setting competitive exchange rates and tax and credit measures to stimulate investment, particularly in infant industries, as well as measures to support research and development and to attract foreign direct investment aimed at bolstering links to local production.

- The Post-2015 Development Framework should include a **clear strategy for structural flexibility in developing economies, including the level of economic openness and the degree of integration in global markets through trade, investment, and financial liberalization**. The latter must be based on the size of the country and its productive specialization. In turn, this requires an active production policy aimed to enhance national capacities, create dynamic competitive advantages, and promote sustained progress in production and export supplies. Moreover, developing countries should be able to implement regulatory mechanisms for their own capital accounts, to avoid importing any disruptions or difficulties in the management of the macroeconomy, in addition to the fight against illicit flows.
- The Post-2015 Development Framework should include an **effective and fair redistribution strategy, encompassing a progressive tax system**, in order to mitigate the increasing gap between poor and rich and secure the necessary revenue from individuals and companies alike, to enable the state to provide public services to citizens. In this regard, it is imperative to reach an agreement on international mechanisms to limit the phenomenon of tax havens, which deprive countries of the South of vast resources from potential taxes. Furthermore, the strategy should include **employment policies aimed at creating decent jobs and addressing the spread of the informal sector**.
- The Post-2015 Development Framework should include a strategy based on a **new global partnership for development, allowing all states and active development actors – including civil society organizations, academia, governments, regional and international institutions, the private sector, the media, and so on – to address global and national challenges**. In turn, this requires the design of collaborative and coherent local and global approaches.

## **V. Arab Demands: Issues and Objectives to for the Post-2015 Agenda**

In addition to the above, CSOs in the Arab Region adopted the Arab recommendations for the sustainable development goals (SDGs) reached at the Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development, held in Jordan on 2-4 April 2014 and organized by ESCWA, the Arab League, UNEP, and UN DESA, in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministries of Planning and International Cooperation and of the Environment.

The proposed Arab goals seem to live up to the aspirations of Arab peoples in terms of addressing challenges and meeting developmental needs in the region. However, since drafting the goals in the context of the post-2015 development agenda is a political process,

the elaboration of such goals will be realized through Arab negotiators in the UN summit to adopt the development agenda on 25-27 September 2015.

On the other hand, in addition to the declared goals, CSOs in the Arab regions call to **integrate the funding mechanisms related to the Financing for Development (FfD) track, led by the UN, within the financial mechanisms of the post-2015 development agenda**. Despite being independent, both tracks raise issues, which are organically integrated; any change to the developmental model would be linked to the outcomes of both tracks. Negotiators at the next leg of the FfD track (Addis Ababa on July 13 to 16, 2015) have already prepared a paper, which includes the basic discussion points and calls for the mobilization of developing countries' national resources to set financing for development in motion.

In this context, and based on the spirit of the Arab proposal for the SDGs, CSOs in the Arab region call for the adoption of the following issues in the post-2015 agenda:

- Considering the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities", adopted by the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, to be a fundamental principle in strengthening the global partnership for development. It places the various development partners opposite their responsibilities to confront the challenges currently faced by humanity. Rich countries evading their responsibilities in supporting development efforts in developing countries is an underlying reason for the failure to achieve the goals.
- Reference should be made to **the need to formulate a new social contract between citizens and the state, based on the principles of human rights, participation, citizenship, accountability, transparency, and social justice**. The social contract should fall within an integrated and homogeneous framework, based on the principles of human rights and linking between environmental sustainability, integrated economic development, human security, and integrated social development. This also entails setting the foundations of democratic, civil developmental states, which put economic, social, cultural, and environmental development at the forefront of their priorities. In turn, **states should enact legislations, which is in line with the prospective goals of the post-2015 agenda framework**.
- **All states should ratify and implement all international conventions, including those related to combating corruption, as well as comply with the requirement to adopt a legislative framework, which recognizes the right to access to information and the protection of witnesses and informants, in addition to strengthening accountability and oversight mechanisms**.
- Freedom of individuals and nations should extend to the political, social, and economic levels. As the Arab uprisings have shown, development will not be achieved without freedom. However, the achievement of freedom requires a number of measures on the political and economic levels. On the political front, it must



include the enjoyment of all political, economic, social, and cultural rights, and the adoption of policies, standards, and targets for the realization of these rights. On the economic front, this means finding a supportive financial system (financial stability and orientation to the real economy, and serving small-scale producer and consumer needs). This is in addition to coordination at the global macroeconomic level, identifying markets for non-speculative goods, and the exchange and affordable access to technology and knowledge. Moreover, a new development-oriented trading and investment system should be established to integrate the right to "policy space" in trade and investment agreements between countries, which would enable developing countries to develop policies that support economic recovery, in terms of enhancing productive capacities, the creation of decent employment opportunities, and contributing to the realization of economic and social rights.

- **Equity and social justice should be included explicitly.** Social Justice – based on the principles of participation, equity, equality and human rights – entails combating all forms of poverty that are not measured by traditional poverty lines, such as access to quality education and healthcare services, unemployment, and inequality. Reports are indicating a huge increase in the rates of disparity between people; the world has reached a stage where the richest 1% of the world's population controls more than 85% of its resources. On the other hand, patterns of inequality are not limited to income; they include geographic, ethnic, religious, and gender-based prejudices, which are a clear obstacle to development. Therefore, the post-2015 agenda must provide an in-depth analysis of these multi-dimensional discrepancies, while setting goals and standards to eliminate them. It should also reconsider the poverty line set at less than \$1.25 a day, according to which poverty levels in the Arab region are 4%, although they are actually much higher. Finally, the approach that considers social protection an additional cost and a burden on the state must be abandoned. It should be replaced with a rights-based approach, through the expansion of social protection floors to include all kinds of citizens, including those working in the informal sector.
- **The rights of refugees and displaced persons must be elaborated and clarified.** This includes the rights of Palestinian refugees, the largest population of refugees in contemporary history, as well as the rights of displaced persons and refugees as a result of wars and economic hardship. The post-2015 agenda must include clear standards for governments, in terms of fair treatment for both refugees and internally displaced persons. Countries of origin should also be encouraged to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin.
- **Addressing gender inequality should be included in the context of changing the above developmental model.** The post-2015 agenda should shift from merely mainstreaming gender equality, towards gender equity, which should be the focus of any new development model, as part of its foundations and a measure of its success, and not merely a secondary outcome of particular policies.

- **Participatory governance frameworks must be enhanced.** The post-2015 development agenda should refer to the rights of various stakeholders to participate at all levels of decision-making. This requires the recognition of civil society as well as other development actors as key partners in identifying issues, policies, and objectives and the implementation of programs of action. This entails allowing access to information and other channels. The post-2015 agenda must also point to the importance of social dialogue, between the various components of society, especially workers, employers, and the state.
- **Social cohesion must be maintained.** The post-2015 agenda should allow for clear political prescriptions to maintain social cohesion, including strengthening the independence of the judiciary and its role in fiscal, administrative, and constitutional oversight, in addition to the enactment of transitional justice mechanisms where needed.
- **The funding mechanisms of the UN-led FfD track must be incorporated into the post-2015 development agenda.** The issues proposed by the FfD track are organically linked to those in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, which must address questions related to reforming national tax systems, changing consumption and production patterns, strengthening the role of the state, reviewing the role of international institutions (such as IMF and OECD) in managing international financial affairs, and following-up on negotiations to restructure sovereign debt. These measures entail curbing tax evasion and exemption under the guise of promoting investment. **CSOs also call for international cooperation on tax issues to implement taxes on capital flow and produce a legally binding agreement under UN auspices to ensure a solid framework for action.** The FfD track must make up an integral part of the post-2015 development agenda. The international dialogue on global partnership for development, in particular, should not be neglected like the case in the framework of financing for development negotiations, merely satisfied with some structural reforms, which had failed to provide the anticipated social equality and development.
- **Environmental questions should be included in all the goals as well as being a standalone goal and the standards and mechanisms for developing coherent environmental objectives must be identified.**
- **The inclusion of "ending the occupation" as a clear and explicit objective and setting a specific time period for ending the occupation.** The Arab region suffers from the longest foreign occupation (Israel) in modern history, which imposes a system of clear racial and religious discrimination. This is not only in violation of international laws and conventions on peace, security, and human rights, but also contravenes with the right to development.