



**Regional Workshop for Civil Society Organizations in the Arab Countries: Regional Approaches for the Implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Beirut June 23-24, 2016**

Outcome Document and Notes of the Civil Society Organizations in the Arab Region on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and Oxfam in the Middle East and North Africa organized a workshop for civil society organizations in the Arab countries entitled “Regional Approaches for the Implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in Beirut on June 23 and 24, 2016, which was funded by the Ford Foundation.

The workshop brought together 60 representatives of civil society organizations, international organizations, trade unions, and experts. The participants agreed on this outcome document which reflects the main discussions and key interventions.

I- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region

On September 25, 2015, world leaders approved a new global development agenda, succeeding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and entitled “Transforming Our World: 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.” It consists of 4 interrelated and indivisible parts, starting with the preamble and the declaration, which contain the Agenda’s terms of reference, namely promoting equality, peace and human rights, eradicating poverty, preserving the planet and revitalizing partnership.

The Agenda includes 17 goals and 169 targets, as well as a part on the means of implementation and another for follow-up and review. 193 countries endorsed the Agenda, including the Arab countries.

The 2030 Agenda is the result of a wide scope of discussions with the participation of the civil society, the private sector and governments. It provides a comprehensive response to the development challenges at the Arab, international, and national levels, in crucial fields such as people, planet Earth, prosperity, peace and partnership. The 2030 Agenda includes numerous additions to the MDGs, and sheds light on important issues of priority to the Arab countries. It should be noted that the 2030 Agenda is indivisible since its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are global in nature, take into account the different situations, capacities and levels of national development, and respect national policies and priorities. The goals are not independent of one another, and should be implemented in an integrated manner.

The SDGs rely on the results achieved by the MDGs and aim to move forward to eradicate poverty in all its forms. The new goals are considered unique in that they call on all countries, rich, poor and middle-income to take the necessary procedures to promote prosperity and protect the planet at the same time. These goals recognize that eradication of poverty must go hand in hand with strategies that achieve sustainable economic growth and address a range of social needs, including education, health,



social protection and employment opportunities, as well as climate change and environment protection at the same time¹.

Perhaps the most notable additions are stressing on moving from an approach aimed at the eradication of extreme poverty to a new approach aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms, reducing inequality within and among countries (Goal 10), as well as linking between development and peace by identifying a goal that promotes building peaceful societies where no one is marginalized, providing access to justice for all, and building efficient, accountable and inclusive societies (Goal 16).

A goal for achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5) was also identified, as well as a goal ensuring the protection of workers' rights and providing a safe work environment, including foreign workers.

Other goals were also added, aiming at meeting sustainable and efficient natural resources management conditions, reducing waste production from food commodities' trading and consumption, and reducing solid waste production through proactive measures, reduction, recycling and reuse.

Despite the expansion of its goals, the 2030 Agenda remains incomplete due to the lack of the political and cultural dimensions, as it did not give the political institutional dimension of development, which is to maintain peace, security and democratic governance, the importance it deserves. The 2030 Agenda almost entirely overlooked the cultural-moral dimension of development.

II- Structural challenges that hinder achieving the implementation of the development goals

Despite the work progress at the international level, the 2030 Agenda faces a significant number of challenges relating to the plan itself or to the extent of the states' ability to implement it [the Agenda], including the Arab countries, which are dealing with several challenges. These countries are witnessing instability, conflicts, high immigration and displacement rates, demographic movements, lack of social equality, growing cases of poverty and unemployment, economic, environmental, and financial crises, as well as a worsening public debt, and challenges related to administration and governance, which constitute real constraints to the desired sustainable development. Thus, it is necessary to tackle these challenges in order to improve the chances of success.

• **The Development Model:** One of the main challenges hindering the achievement of the MDGs included transforming these goals into an agenda separated from the discussion of the requirements of the necessary structural transformation in order to achieve a comprehensive development.

No action was taken towards reforming the global financial and commercial systems, which constitute a challenge that hampers development efforts in developing countries, including Arab countries. Goals and targets were used as benchmarks to assess progress at the national level away from the international policies' repercussions on national and local development. The Arab countries'

¹ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ar/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/12/SDG.Overview.pdf>



Development Model — based on economic growth and foreign investment regardless of its sources and objectives and away from the foundations of a fair and comprehensive development — which was followed during the period of implementation of the Millennium Development Agenda is one of the structural challenges that hampered the development process in the region. This is in addition to the neopatrimonialism [prevailing] in the regional states, which are still rentier states at the economic, social and political levels. These states depend on non-productive economies which lack mechanisms for redistribution of wealth and social protection. This economic trend, which has been followed for decades, has proven its inability to achieve fair and sustainable development. Even if some development indicators registered a slight improvement, problems arising from the lack of an adequate response to the desire of citizens to live in dignity² have piled up. Furthermore, the exclusion of many segments of the society from the development process, and the multiple exclusion and marginalization of women, youth, and disabled persons constitutes a violation of human rights and an impediment to the development process in the region with a negative impact affecting the society as a whole. It is clear that the development approach followed in the national plans to achieve the 2030 Agenda as set by some of the Arab countries did not adequately review this model.

- **Tax Regulations:** Achieving equality at the national level requires reexamining the state's regulatory role, which allows it to protect and fulfil the citizens' rights, and drawing policies that focus on equitable redistribution through taxation and the provision of services. However, this approach has not been followed in most Arab countries³, since the indicators used to measure the progress in terms of the sustainable development goals showed the continuation of the development model that gives a higher role for the private sector and depends on it to finance development without increasing taxes on companies to broaden the tax base. On the contrary, this development model tends to impose taxes on consumers through the VAT. Moreover, [tax] collection and distribution [of wealth] through taxes and services are not fair and are marred by a fundamental flaw as they burden the citizens and employees and favour big companies and investors. It is well known that the Arab countries in general have poor tax regulations and the concept of citizen's rights associated with tax is almost inexistent.

- **Public Debt:** Indebtedness is a long-standing and radical problem and approaches by financial institutions are incomplete. It is worth mentioning that even European countries, which were considered relatively rational borrowers, are hit by a debt crisis, hence the need for radical solutions. The Arab countries depend heavily on external financing and debt, and public debt service takes up a high proportion of the State's budget, which adversely affects social spending and significantly hinders the achievement of the SDGs. It should be noted that the public debt problem does not receive the attention it deserves, and most countries practice the “ignore and stall policy”, as if public debt was a normal matter or will disappear either automatically or through political deals with lenders.

² National Report, Egypt, Social Watch Report 2016: Lack of strategy in the 2030 strategy, prepared by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) and the New Woman Foundation available at: <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/17218>

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• **Global Partnership for Development:** the Agenda also includes a new concept for “Global Partnership for [Sustainable] Development” based on “the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities” which was adopted at the Earth Summit on Sustainable Development. However, the 2030 Agenda changed this concept of “partnership” into “partnerships” among a group of key players and stakeholders in the development process without adequately and clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms. This entails the risk of undermined responsibilities and weakened possibilities of accountability, especially in light of the lack of accountability mechanisms for all parties. Moreover, the global influential powers having the final say on the international economic and governance system seek to undermine this principle, which they were forced to adopt in the environmental area. These powers are fighting the idea of mainstreaming this principle on other areas such as economic, social, and even political development, especially in terms of wars and conflicts with an international dimension.

III- Challenges related to mechanisms of public policy-making and development planning processes in the Arab region:

Policy-making and development planning processes in the Arab region are characterized by the lack of dialogue between stakeholders (such as civil society organizations, the private sector, trade unions, and the media). This significantly affects the quality of the adopted policies and their efficient implementation. Although the 2030 Agenda stresses the importance of partnerships in achieving sustainable development, yet the plans developed in some Arab countries did not achieve the required participation. The total lack of community participation and the campaign against non-governmental organizations in many Arab countries are key challenges that hinder the achievement of the desired partnership development. On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda includes a wide range of goals and targets, which poses a great difficulty for states and parties concerned with turning them into comprehensive, consistent and efficient development plans, and makes commitment to the principle of interdependence and integration between goals and targets within an integrated approach very difficult. It should be noted that the 17 goals and 169 targets will be monitored using a series of global indicators that have been approved by the 47th session of the Statistical Commission in March 2016⁴. The governments will have to develop their own national indicators to help monitor progress in terms of achieving the nationally adopted goals and targets. This is a complex and challenging matter for Arab governments. The Arab region is not known for coordination and cooperation between ministries and within departments or for achieving total coherence of public policies. Rather, it is common in this region that good plans may sometimes be developed but not implemented at all, or executed with bad implementation mechanisms. This prevents linking national strategies with budget allocations, follow-up, and accountability mechanisms. Back to the developed national plans, most of them were not coupled with implementation strategies or methods, or feasibility studies assessing the possibility of realizing goals on the ground. This raises questions about the seriousness in achieving the goals while the Arab countries tend to follow the United Nations and international financial

⁴ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-IAEG-SDGs-E.pdf>



institutions' inclinations to improve their economic and political situation, without a real assessment of the suitability of these inclinations to [these countries respective] national situation.

IV- The Notes of Civil Society Organizations

I. At the national policy level:

- 1) **Reconsidering the development model:** Achieving sustainable development and meeting the Agenda's requirements require a change of the current development model, the options, and the economic and social policies, so as not be limited to the concept of economic growth and rely on the principles of justice and equality. This requires paying attention to the structural, economic, social, demographic, geographic challenges and others, which generate inequalities, and affect the countries' options. All development partners; national, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, should cooperate to protect the national policies space, which is strained by globalization, which is considered a necessary condition to achieve the right to development, and a prerequisite for the success of the national development strategy, in conjunction with the international obligation to respect countries' sovereignty.
 - Highlighting the cultural and political dimensions since they constitute two main components of the development process, in addition to the economic, social and environmental dimensions. The conflicts, displacement, and declining development plaguing the region and which are clearly associated with political and cultural dimensions, consecrate the need for a comprehensive multi-dimensional development approach that addresses the root cause of the problems in the region and not only remedies the consequences. This approach also requires building on the different resources and capacities available in the Arab region, noting that culture and heritage richness, as well as human capacities are important opportunities that must be banked on in terms of development planning.
 - Revitalizing the **role of the state** as a key player in the development process, particularly in terms of respecting, protecting and ensuring citizens' rights, compelling investors and capitalists to abide by the necessary standards, laws, and measures, and shifting from the concept of care and targeting to the concept of comprehensive social protection. The role of the state concerning the relationship with other development partners must be focused on in order to lead a social dialogue between the various economic and social constituents, including representatives from the business sector, the civil society organizations, trade unions, and women, youth, cultural movements, including disabled persons. This will help determining the role of each of the parties in the development process and social protection.
 - **Redistribution** through the tax system, on the condition of fair distribution of cost, limitation of tax evasion, and exemptions aimed at attracting investment without taking into consideration the resulting widening gap of inequality. The concept of wages must be reexamined, since it is a means of redistribution and expansion of the consumer base in the community, which enhances production.



- Calling on the Arab states, governments, and development partners to exert pressure for the adoption of an **international framework for debt restructuring** based on the basic principles adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, while identifying the coordination mechanisms between the donors, and placing development and human rights at the center of its priorities.
 - Highlighting the basic role of the **private sector** in the development process, particularly in terms of investments and production, with a focus on the need to be alert to the risks of partnerships between the public and private sectors in light of poor public institutions in the Arab countries, which leads to an imbalance in these partnerships in favour of the private sector, and violates the citizen's right to access public services, because of high prices or lack of service quality or financial overloading of public budgets. Focus should also be on the need to adopt clear mechanisms to regulate the role of the private sector in the development process, and to adopt a binding international convention based on human rights standards and ensuring the multinational companies' abidance by their duties across borders according to the Maastricht principles.
 - Stressing that **Goal 16** is pivotal to the Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region, including: peace and security, and good governance (anti-corruption, recovery of stolen assets, modernization of management, transparency, access to information ... etc), since there is no security and no peace without governance, and vice versa. Ensuring human rights and good governance and ensuring this interdependence between peace, security and sustainable development, is at the heart of the transition process in the Arab region.
 - Emphasizing the importance of Goal 5, "**Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**" but with the need to ensure that all national policies and strategies follow approaches aiming at achieving gender equality by promoting civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women as a strategic priority for achieving sustainable development.
 - The need to adopt a new **holistic development framework** based on the human rights principles set forth in the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ensuring the representation of the various categories of disabled persons at all stages of formulation of the regional and national development plans. Legislations must be issued, which must take into account international standards and conventions that promote the economic and social integration of disabled people. These legislations must be stringently implemented and an appropriate environment must be ensured at the public and private institutions level to achieve integration. Moreover, the various technological and awareness means must be provided to facilitate and guarantee the participation of disabled persons at all stages and levels. This is in addition to capacity building and job skills development of disabled people as well as raising the awareness of the community and employers on the culture of integration and diversity and highlighting the potentials of persons with disabilities.
- 2) **Drawing and implementing national plans:** The human rights approach is the base of the 2030 Agenda, and must have a direct impact when making choices, drawing policies, and



making comparisons (pros & cons) between benefit and right. All development parties, including the private sector, governments, and civil society, must abide by human rights as a reference. The successful implementation of the Agenda largely depends on the national action, which requires:

- Mainstreaming sustainable development and national goals within the scope of national development plans and strategies (or develop new plans for this purpose) and following-up on their full implementation.
- Developing an efficient institutional framework ensuring coordination and dialogue with various stakeholders, in order to plan and set strategies, follow-up on their implementation, and monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs, which is essential to activate accountability mechanisms at the national level.
- Set priorities according to the national contexts through a transparent and participatory national process aimed to define priorities and guided by the level of ambition of the global sustainable development goals and targets, but taking into account the national circumstances.
- Strive to achieve integration at the national plans level outside the scope of the sectoral concept and follow an integrated approach in terms of national development efforts. This requires working beyond individual goals and targets and searching for the objective nexus existing between them.

II. At the regional level

The Arab region is witnessing regional and cross border challenges, in terms of stability, security, migrant workforce, and natural resources. In this respect the participants stress on the following:

- The importance of regional cooperation to find solutions and policies ensuring the sustainability of resources and a decent life for all.
- The need to think about regional production chains, allowing the workforce to move between states according to supply, enhancing the productive capacity, reducing competition, and contributing to the expansion of markets and the movement of goods.
- The importance of increasing funding from within the region and developing a regional financing mechanism to achieve the SDGs.
- The importance of cooperating with the League of Arab States institutions, particularly within the context of the *2016-2026 Decade of Arab Civil Society Organizations to achieve Sustainable Development Goals*, which binds the League of Arab States and Member States to strengthen partnership with civil society in order to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs. This is in addition to the importance of the role of the civil society in keeping up with the Arab efforts at the regional and national levels, particularly in terms of developing plans and programs and taking part in their implementation, developing the capacities of the stakeholders, working on assessing efforts and commitments, and following-up on the adopted accountability mechanisms.
- The need to call the United Nations regional organization, particularly the ESCWA — in its capacity as the entity responsible for coordinating the work of the UN in terms of following-



up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda — to assume an efficient role in finding areas of communication and dialogue between governments, civil society and the private sector and to be committed to assume its role in seeing to the various development partners' abidance by the requirements of implementing the 2013 Agenda.

III. At the international level

- The successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires uniting the efforts of all parties concerned with development at the national, regional and international levels, and building a genuine international partnership based on respect, equality and commitment to the Human Rights System and the orientations and terms of reference of the global Agenda.
- It is necessary to exert pressure and act in order for the trading system to become development-oriented and to give developing countries the right to catch up with the developed countries in terms of development and to use the tools that allowed these developed countries to attain their current levels of development. It is also necessary that the assessment of the developing countries' future trade integration capacity be coupled with the assessment of the implications of the trade agreements, concluded and to be concluded, on the economic and social levels. It is also necessary that the trade agreements concluded between developing and developed countries include the right to a political space as a standard example, allowing developing countries to reconsider their economic growth support policies in terms of generation of job opportunities and development and the reduction of the potential negative consequences that may result from future liberalization.
- It is necessary that developing countries exert pressure in order to achieve more transparency, democracy and participation. A successful and efficient method of access to information must be provided. The voting system must be reexamined, including in the international financial institutions, so as to increase the efficiency of representation and influence of developing countries in the decisions of these institutions.
- It is necessary to exert pressure to stop the flow of arms, limit illicit financial flows, and recover stolen assets that are important in our region as well.

The participants in the workshop — who participated in the activities of the ESCWA Regional Forum on Sustainable Development held in Amman on May 29-30, 2016, and who contributed actively in the discussions of this Forum and formulated the notes that were issued by it support the content of these notes that the ESCWA will submit to the Global High Level Policy Forum in July 2016.

The participants believe that the positions, notes, and recommendations contained in this declaration are in line with the notes of the Forum and contain additional complementary notes or positions that are more distinguished and specific than the independent position of the civil society organizations that participated in the workshop and that are consistent with the reached outcome and push this outcome one step forward from the perspective of a specific development party, that is the civil society.