

Regional Meeting for Civil Society on Sustainable Development
On the way to the Summit of the Future



Agenda

Date: March 4, 2024

09:00-09:30 Welcome and Registration

Ziad Abdel Samad
Roberto Bissio
Dr. Moustafa Barghouti

09:30-11:00 Session I: Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development

Themes covered: SDG 16- 17 geopolitical context, war, human rights and sustainable development

Proposed questions:

- How does the current geopolitical context influence the region's peace, human rights, and sustainable development? What are the critical repercussions of ongoing conflicts on the prospects of achieving peace, human rights, and sustainable development?
- Looking at the wars, occupation, and genocide in the region and their implications on human rights and sustainable development, what is the role of international bodies in addressing crises and promoting human rights?
- Examining the current global governance system's limitations in addressing the challenges faced by the Arab region, what potential improvements or alternative approaches can we propose to enhance global governance effectiveness?

Moderator:
Gehan Abuzeid

Speakers:
Dr. Sari Hanafi
Rabih Nasr (Online)

11:00-11:15 Break



Regional Meeting for Civil Society on Sustainable Development
On the way to the Summit of the Future



Agenda

11:15-12:45

Session II: Fostering Social Justice as the Cornerstone for Sustainable Development

Themes covered: SDG 1-2-17 Social Justice, Poverty, Financing for Development

Moderator:
Farah Chami

Proposed questions:

- Considering the prevalent vast inequalities in the Arab region, what are the primary challenges and issues surrounding the social protection policies and their financing within the region?
- How can the pursuit of social justice in the Arab region be strategically integrated into sustainable development initiatives, addressing the socio-political context of the region?
- How can we build a more equitable financing path for development and formulate rights-based economic and social policies to protect Arab societies from debt crises and their consequences?

Speakers:
Olga Jbeili
Nabil Abdo
Muhamad Sultan

12:45-13:30

Lunch Break

13:30-15:00

Session III: Questioning partnership for sustainable development amid restrictive policies and lack of accountability and inclusion

Themes covered: SDG 17-16-5 accountability, the role of the private sector, civic space and youth

Moderator:
Kinda Hattar

Proposed questions:

- To overcome civic space and participation challenges, how can mutually accountable partnerships be forged between development actors in the Arab region to foster inclusive governance and sustainable development?
- What are the key challenges of private finance to accelerate sustainable development, and where do we stand towards effective accountability frameworks?
- Amid repressed civil society, how can we ensure youth/gender voices are heard in relevant processes for enhancing participation and accountability?

Speakers:
Kinda Mohamadih
Manar Zaiter
Refaat Sabaah

15:00-15:15

Break



Regional Meeting for Civil Society on Sustainable Development On the way to the Summit of the Future



Agenda

15:15-16:45

Session IV: Navigating Climate Realities: Global Commitments and Future Imperatives for the ARAB Region

Moderator:
Meriem Benkhouya

Themes covered: SDG 13-17 climate justice, climate financing

Speakers:

Proposed questions:

- Given the recent climate crises in the Arab region and the pressing need for immediate action, how can the outcomes of COP28 be strategically leveraged to address regional concerns, focusing on both mitigation and adaptation in response to the escalating environmental challenges?
- What factors contribute to the gap between commitments to climate justice and available climate funding? In what ways do these factors represent a failure in the global system's response to climate challenges?
- What recommendations can be proposed to strengthen and enhance climate action in the future, considering the lessons learned from past efforts and the evolving landscape of environmental challenges worldwide?

Habib Maalouf
Ahmed Mansour (online)
Hala Murad

16:45-17:00

Closing Remarks



Regional Meeting for Civil Society on Sustainable Development

On the Way to the Summit of the Future



Draft Concept Note

Date: March 4, 2024

Introduction

Today's world reflects a bleak picture; seemingly devoid of a promising tomorrow, as the phrases “transforming our world and transforming our future” are mere buzzwords in our daily discourse. On one hand we aspire for peace, greener and sustainable economies, dignity and social justice for all transcending discrimination. On the other hand our actions continue to cultivate political, social and economic, cultural and environmental systems that exacerbate inequalities, injustices, conflict and war. The daily struggles we face, intricately linked to intergenerational development challenges, mirror the enduring failures deeply ingrained in systemic structures over decades.

While the United Nations primary objectives - maintaining international peace and security, protecting human rights, providing humanitarian aid, supporting sustainable development and climate action and upholding international law are enshrined in the Agenda 2030, the transformational potential of these words do not materialize into tangible actions.

Planet Earth is facing existential threats from human impact on the land, sea, and air – on its ecological systems and its diverse forms of life. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating social injustices, and wars have tested international institutions and calls for a newly strengthened multilateral system that is better equipped to respond to shared challenges.

One of the most glaring is the failure to implement and operationalize the universal normative human rights standards meaningfully and at scale (i.e., for non-majoritarian groups and communities) – essentially failing to provide meaningful protection. This is compounded by a continuous erosion of human rights, substantial jobs and income losses, and the escalation of protests and unrest met by violent repression.

This system is also facing several challenges in terms of partnerships between governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and civil society which affects the aid effectiveness system. Additional pressure has been exerted by many development agencies in some donor countries who are terminating partnerships with civil society and human rights defenders critical grave violations of international law and international humanitarian law.

Failure to address climate change is another critical issue. The global system failed to address climate change before it escalated into a global emergency. The future prospect of the planet becoming uninhabitable due to rising temperatures and extreme weather events underscores

the urgent need for principles transcending borders in managing climate disasters, mitigating risks of instability, and addressing disputes related to territorial and maritime claims.

This global context is reflected in the Arab region where armed conflicts significantly impede the attainment of SDGs, necessitating a halt to conflict, violence, and weapons proliferation. The region's complex conflict environment, coupled with the global retrenchment of human rights, particularly in the case of Palestine, poses an existential dilemma, challenging the implementation of universal normative frameworks. Additionally, the shrinking space for civic participation in the Arab region is a critical concern, with states increasingly imposing restrictions on the human rights of their citizens and limiting avenues for participation and protest. Another critical issue for the region is related to refugees and migrants. The Arab region is hosting millions of international migrants and Arab countries were the origin of millions of refugees. In addition to the growth of discriminatory rhetoric, there are no plans for safe return and the minimum protections are not available. In light of recent European policies, refugees, and migrants suffer from difficult humanitarian conditions, which requires a radical change in the countries' approach to migration and asylum, as no political arguments can justify the measures taken. It causes harm to people intentionally and consciously, and its devastating consequences cannot be ignored.

Whereas 2024, a decade after the adoption of the Agenda 2030 hosts the Summit of the Future focused on multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow, the realities of the region indicates that the focus should rather be on revitalizing multilateral system addressing root causes of development challenges for a rights-based sustainable future for all.

Sustainable development and financing for development

The financing gap for sustainable development is de-facto generated by the architecture of neoliberal globalization and its associated patterns of extractions and dependencies. Repackaging financing models that prioritize profit over people, promote privatization at the expense of the full enjoyment of human rights, and increasing debt and dependency only exacerbates our worsened situation.

The global economy has experienced several waves of debt accumulation over the past years, which ended with financial crises in many emerging markets and developing economies. Debt in low-income developing countries rose significantly in the last two decades. More than half of low-income developing countries are in or at high risk of debt distress. This approach has hindered countries from offering basic services and social protection to their citizens, forcing governments to choose between serving their people or servicing their debt. This approach does not herald a new era for multilateralism, where countries collaboratively address global problems; the international system acts swiftly to protect everyone in emergencies; and the UN is universally recognized as a trusted platform for collaboration.

We need, instead, a profound reform of the international tax, debt and financial architecture under the aegis of the United Nations. This reform could involve establishing a multilateral legal framework that would comprehensively address unsustainable and illegitimate debt, including through extensive debt restructuring and cancellation. Additionally, it could include agreeing on

an intergovernmental, negotiated UN Tax Convention to comprehensively address tax havens, tax abuse by multinational corporations and other illicit financial flows, among others¹. At this critical juncture, there is an urgent need to prioritize achieving maximum development impact and significantly increasing Official Development Assistance (ODA) levels and their effectiveness. This is essential to fulfill long standing commitments and to ensure that the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is well-prepared for the challenges of the future.

International peace and security

Aspirations for international peace and security are buried under rubbles in Gaza alongside thousands of children, women and elderly today but also in all other countries where we continue to witness war and conflict. Syria, Sudan, Yemen are no different. Decades-long wars turn into `normal` while the deadlock at the UN- observed by millions- continue to result in loss of lives every single second. The freedom from want and freedom from fear of millions are set aside amid veto power of a handful of countries. The calls for ceasefire by millions protesting are not only overlooked but even worse restricted, violating freedoms of speech and peaceful assembly. In such a context where young generations are considered as the engines of change, unfortunately they cannot think about the future but rather focus on their daily struggles of survival only.

However the global system has failed to address the perennial issues of peace and security, necessitating the establishment of a “New Agenda for Peace”, which outlines a vision for multilateral efforts for peace and security, based on international law, and recognizes the inter-linked nature of many of the challenges we face. Furthermore this context of no peace and no security allows those controlling power and the arms trade to profit from war but in turn results in further global problems of displacement and migration. At this stage, securitization of the migration, measures for border control and militarization of aid are no panacea. On the contrary, what we need is to address root causes of conflicts, injustices and inequalities that we see at multidimensional levels. This entails upholding the right to self-determination and ensuring that impunity is not tolerated.

Youth and future generations

From MDGs to SDGs decades passed, generations changed but so did our development challenges at economic, political, environmental levels. The intergenerational development challenges we face, demands action, requiring the active engagement of youth and future generations in all policy processes. The aim is not to make decisions about their future but rather to make decisions with them for their present and future. It is evident that today's socio-economic, environmental policies create inequalities and injustices for next generations burdening them rather than providing relief. These policy choices do not build a future for them but rather borrow from the potential of future generations.

¹ <https://csoforffd.org/2023/06/19/statement-concerns-on-the-summit-for-a-new-global-financing-pact-and-its-governance-and-policy-implications/>

The words² of an Arab youth puts the stance of youth crystal clear in front of our eyes: “Is it reasonable for young people who have learned lessons about development, human rights, democracy, and peacebuilding over the past years to regain hope and confidence in these lessons after seeing that these rights only receive attention when influential people are concerned? Are we facing a deception that resembles a modern-day Trojan horse but with different concepts, context, time, and place than before, under agendas, programs, and names that we sometimes accept eagerly and passionately? ...The world has unanimously agreed on the SDGs as an international agenda and guiding normative framework to which countries have pledged to implement their commitments. However, does it embody a deception and a distraction to divert the world's attention from national and sovereign concerns, distracting them with development issues?’”

Transforming global governance

A starting point for transforming global governance is a genuine reflection and questioning the "leave no one behind" approach. In other words³ “Does the call to leave no-one behind apply to decision-making, governance and accountability or is it limited to the provision of services? Does this commitment reflect a rights-holder orientation or a consumer/client one?”

"We the peoples" welcomes one that opens the UN Charter. Yet at this stage amid legally binding treaties and voluntary commitments towards development we see lack of trust to the global governance system we have built and we the peoples understanding moving away from international cooperation and collaboration understanding. The call for reform and transforming global governance system is much needed based on a fair and agreed normative framework.

International cooperation, peace and security, the rejection of power politics, international law, cosmopolitanism, and institutional liberalism, are all facets of the global system that have fallen short of achieving absolute individual or state prosperity, peace, cooperation, or liberties. Global crises, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, have exposed states true nature. Driven by states' interests, global institutions have failed to tackle the world's major challenges. Furthermore, financial leaders and institutions have not adequately prioritized the 'most vulnerable' or implemented measures to restore stability, confidence, and growth to the global economy.

Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

Addressing our collective challenges through science, technology, and innovation is no longer a distant utopian vision. The digital transformations and collaborations we witness daily have become a reality for millions. However, it's crucial to recognize that the ongoing digital transition is predominantly led by those who hold power and benefit from digital capitalism. This has

² <https://www.annd.org/en/publications/details/integrating-palestinian-youth-into-international-development-efforts-between-reality-and-speculations-tamara-teebi>

³ https://www.2030spotlight.org/sites/default/files/spot2019/Spotlight_Innenteil_2019_web_chapter_I_Adams.pdf

resulted in a digital divide where many are left behind due to a lack of knowledge, financial resources, and human capital.

To bridge this gap, the establishment of a global digital compact is imperative. This compact should be grounded in the fundamental right to development, and the multilateral system must extend institutional support to the Global South. This support aims to empower developing countries in acquiring policy frameworks and institutional capacity for the effective and efficient taxation of the digital economy. Additionally, international financial institutions should play a role by providing low-interest funds dedicated to digital infrastructure development in developing countries. This comprehensive approach seeks to ensure that the benefits of digital advancements are shared inclusively across the global community.

Objectives of the Regional Meeting for Civil Society

The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) convenes this year amidst a global backdrop marked by aforementioned interconnected and interrelated pressing challenges. The AFSD plays a pivotal role in the preparations for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) during which six Arab countries (Mauritania, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Oman) are scheduled to present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). AFSD will also prepare for the Summit of the Future "Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow", aiming to foster cooperation on critical challenges, address gaps in global governance, and recommit to existing obligations including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Charter.

In this context ANND organizes one day Regional Meeting for Civil Society on the way to the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the Summit of the Future to address sustainable development priorities from a regional perspective, engage in discussions on progress, review national experiences, and amplify the region's voice. It enables a platform for exchange among civil society actors unpacking multilateral challenges for achieving multilateral solutions and defining rights-based and sustainable future as the better future.