

# Five Years from 2015 Policy Issues at the Core of the MDGs Discussion in the Arab Region

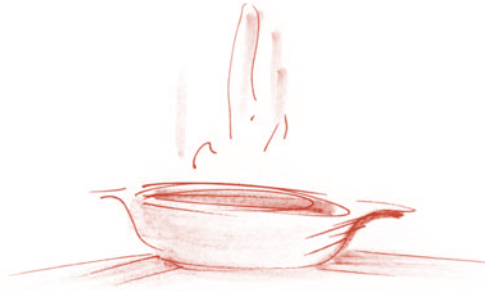
An Overview By  
The Arab NGO Network for Development



## *At the current rate of progress, the Millennium Development*

### *Goals (MDGs) will not be met in the Arab region by 2015<sup>1</sup>.*

The main reasons for this slow pace include lack of commitment to the notion of human rights and the principles of good governance, fragile political stability and deficient democracy, as well as the lack of a peaceful and sustainable framework for action. Equally detrimental is the international community's weak and ambiguous support for Goal 8 concerning global partnerships for development, and the feeble political will to achieve economic and social justice in the region.



What follows is a summary of observations that were highlighted in a regional report entitled “Assessing the Millennium Development Goals Process in the Arab Region; A Survey of Key Issues”, which was prepared by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) and launched in July 2010. It also considers observations from a series of case studies from seven Arab countries, namely Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Sudan.

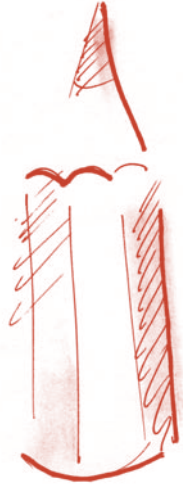
ANND had published in 2008, and in partnership with the Center for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR) and UNDP, a guide on planning and working for the MDGs by civil society and media groups. Beyond this, ANND coordinates with several international networks, playing a leading role in the global civil society efforts to advance the MDGs, such as the Global Call to Action against Poverty and the Social Watch.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the UN 2010 progress report on the MDGs, the countries of West Asia and North Africa (covering most Arab countries) continue to see the least progress on most of the MDGs according to the 2010 UN Report (see highlights attached). They face enormous challenges in reducing poverty, improving health, and empowering women. For Western Asia countries specifically, the report notes steady rise in poverty between 1990 and 2005, increase in the prevalence of hunger, increase in job insecurities, lack of progress on reducing the proportion of mal nourished children and those underweight, and weak progress on enrollment in primary education and addressing gender gaps in education, specifically secondary levels.

## *The overall developmental situation in the Arab region*

- **The loss of economic initiative and comprehensive development-oriented policy making** has led to the disconnection between economic growth and development in the Arab Region<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, as surges in oil prices and remittances led to documented economic dividends in several Arab countries, **development indicators seemed to stagnate** in those very countries. Indeed, wealth creating policies have been detached from redistribution policies and interventions, thus leading to increasing gaps in various Arab countries. **Inequalities persist** between rural and urban areas as well as between various countries in the region and different groups within them, especially women, youth, and persons with disabilities.



- **The economy is one area of policy making particularly affected by the decline of national sovereignty.** Structural adjustment plans as well as multilateral and bilateral prescriptions have withdrawn the State in the Arab countries from vast sectors of the economy and left it unable to provide opportunities that the most vulnerable segments of the populations need.

- **Due to limited participative and accountable governmental processes, corruption and waste are a further debilitating factor in Arab countries,** which aggravates the development situation as it siphons funds destined to support the more vulnerable segments of society. This is a particularly notable issue in least developing countries in the Arab region, where newly discovered mineral resources and revenues from the recent exploitation of these resources have not led to a rise in social expenditure.

- **Most Arab Countries** (apart from the oil rich countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council) **are dependent on foreign aid and debt for the basic functions of government,** which makes them more dependent on donor conditionality. Irrespective of the actual conditions and their intent, the entrenching of the bargaining mentality has led to piecemeal reforms, which do not amount to an enabling institutional environment. To the contrary, they have sapped the public authorities' ability to plan and implement comprehensive and constructive reform programs.

2 1 According to the Joint Arab Economic Report (2009), published by the Arab Monetary Fund, percentage of growth achieved by Arab countries in 2008 was 26.2% from 2007.

- While there has been a considerable rise in education of females in the Arab Region, **the levels of women's political participation and economic contributions remain some of the lowest in the world.** Furthermore, the global economic and financial crisis has greatly affected the region and the status of women, thus placing a greater burden on them while forcing them in larger numbers into the informal sector and unpaid work.

- While regional integration has been a strong vector of development around the world, **the Arab Region has been unable to make progress on its plans for economic and developmental cooperation.**

### ***The MDGs in policy making***

- **The MDGs have yet to be mainstreamed in policy-making processes in Arab Countries.** While the MDGs have been increasingly appearing in official discourse, they are far from being systematically integrated in social and economic policies.

- One overarching issue that is impeding the mainstreaming of a rights-based, pro-active approach to the MDGs is the lack or inadequacy of national development strategies in Arab Countries. **Indeed, most Arab Countries have yet to develop comprehensive, strategic, workable visions for national development, with clear division of tasks among different government agencies.**

- **Most governments in the Arab Region remain autocratic and repressive.** Even those countries with relatively democratic institutions are opaque and non-participative when it comes to policy making. Among the factors contributing to this situation is the internal imbalance between the vastly powerful executive branches and the often marginalized legislative branch. A general lack of transparency is both a result of this imbalance and an exacerbating factor. Accordingly, effective access to civil society voices remains amply limited.



- **The perception of the MDGs in Arab Countries as benchmarks for basic human, social and economic rights has yet to reach policy-makers.**



The MDGs are mostly seen as a foreign and normative addition rather than a reference and set of targets to be used in designing social and economic policies.

## ***Reporting on the MDGs***

- **MDG Reports in the Arab Region tend to be descriptive and vague.**

They generally lack the critical analysis that would allow them to be tools for policy reform and improvement, and the recommendations they provide tend to be abstract and normative, rather than concrete and measurable.

- **Data remains a problem in Arab Countries,** whereby MDGs reports often present outdated numbers. In general, social and economic statistics tend to be sparsely available, and when coming from official sources are often called into question for their accuracy.

- **Assessing poverty in the Arab Region remains a challenge facing development practitioners.** In most Arab Countries (apart from LDCs such as Yemen and Sudan), money-metric measurements yield very low levels of poverty despite considerable sections of the population living with unsatisfied basic needs. For example, the global MDG report 2010 shows a level of poverty in the region of West Asia and North Africa to be the lowest among other regions (6% in West Asia increasing from 2% in 1990 and 3% in West Asia decreasing from 5% in 1990). These calculations at 1.25 USD per day are significantly distant from average levels of poverty calculated at the national poverty lines and averaging around 30% in least developing Arab countries, such as Comoros, Sudan,



Djibouti, Yemen, Mauritania, and Palestine, and around 20% in Egypt, 13% in Jordan, 11.4% in Syria, 9% in Morocco, and 8% in Lebanon<sup>1</sup>. The lack of relevant and adequate statistical methodologies in most Arab countries' administrations, in addition to the over-dependence on quantitative indicators, limit the ability to properly track and address the overall living conditions in the region.



### ***The conditions facing civil society organizations in the Arab region***

- **In most Arab Countries, civil society organizations find themselves impeded through measures ranging from restrictive laws to active repression.** Even in countries with some degree of civil liberties, the role and perspectives of civil society organizations are often ignored by policy makers.

- One notable aspect of the MDGs-related reporting is the inclusion of civil society organizations in the process in a few Arab Countries. **However, the MDG process in Arab countries lack the overall participation of civil society organizations in the planning and the implementation stage.**



## Overall recommendations

- Undertake **political reforms** that enhance transparency, accountability, and democratic transition of power. Such a context should allow the local peoples to have a say in policy making through various institutions and institutional processes, whether constitutional, political, or administrative.
- **Reform economic policies** where there is ample need to concentrate on reviving the productive sectors and refocusing on decent-jobs creation and employment as central issues to social and economic policies, with an emphasis on decent work in sustainable productive sectors.
- **Establish comprehensive social policies** with particular attention and additional resources directed to support women, people with disabilities, migrants, and those living below or around poverty lines and low human development indicators.
- Revise the policy assumptions behind socio-economic policy making- which has been increasingly focused on trade liberalization, foreign direct investment, debt, and remittances- and **re-orient development priorities** in a sustainable way.
- **Mainstream the MDGs in economic and social policies** in an actionable and measurable manner, with clear assignment of duties and responsibilities among government agencies and in coordination with civil society organizations as a partner.
- Set in place clear policies that allow **enhancing aid and foreign direct investments in areas and sectors with economic, social, and environmental added value**, which directly contribute to poverty eradication, increase in employment opportunities, progress on gender equality, and support of local human development priorities.
- **Mobilize regional financial resources**, through regional channels and funds, to be used towards sustainable development and achieving the MDGs, particularly access to quality basic economic and social infrastructure.
- Enhance cooperation in promoting a **development architecture that is based on intra-regional cooperation** and recognition of the special needs of less developed countries in the region. Such steps necessitate revision and reform of the mandates and mechanisms of existing regional institutions.
- Make available **more spaces for active participation of various social stakeholders**, including civil society organizations and particularly women's groups, in drawing up economic and governance frameworks in general and MDG related ones in particular. This necessitates upholding the right of association and the freedom for civil society organizations to operate without undue hindrances.

## *The Arab NGO Network for Development*

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) is a regional advocacy network with members in eleven countries. ANND members include 7 national networks and 27 individual CSOs. ANND was established in 1997 and its headquarter office is located in Beirut since 2001. ANND aims at strengthening the role of civil society, enhancing the values of democracy, respect of human rights and sustainable development in the region.

### *ANND and the MDGs*

ANND has been working on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) since their launch at the Millennium Summit in the year 2000. The network perceives the MDGs as a tool to monitor and track development progress and to advocate for policy change and more effective national socio-economic policies. The MDGs do not represent end targets in themselves.

As such, ANND has been involved in many regional and national initiatives to build the capacities of development actors on the MDGs and develop persistent and constructive partnerships between governmental agencies, international organizations and civil society groups in this area.

#### Contacts;

ANND Executive Office  
Al- Zuheiri Bldg. 4th floor  
Wata El Musaitabi, Cola Area  
P.O.Box: 5792/14, Mazraa: 1105 – 2070  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: (961) 1 319 366  
Fax: (961) 1 815 636  
Email: [annd@annd.org](mailto:annd@annd.org)  
Website: [www.annd.org](http://www.annd.org)

