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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Arab High Level Forum on Sustainable Development  
Amman, 2-4 April 2014

**Sustainable Development Goals ... An Arab  
Regional Perspective**

ESCWA

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# Sustainable Development Goals ... An Arab Regional Perspective<sup>1</sup>

May 2014<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This document was prepared by the Sustainable Development and Productivity Division (Reem Nejdawi and Jana El-Baba), and the Economic Development and Globalization Division (Khalid Abu-Ismael and Niranjana Sarangi) with inputs and reviews by other substantive divisions in ESCWA.

<sup>2</sup> This is a revised version of the document, issued earlier in March 2014. It reflects comments submitted by the participants at the Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development, which was held in Amman during the period 2-4 April 2014.

## I. Introduction

The development community is standing at an intersection. While efforts at the global, regional and national levels intensify to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) before the endpoint set for 2015, two global intergovernmental processes were launched that are expected to shape the global development agenda beyond 2015: a) The elaboration of a post-2015 development agenda, as mandated by the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the MDGs; b) The formulation of a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), as mandated by the 2012 Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). These two processes have converged, and it is now widely agreed that a single, balanced and comprehensive set of goals, universal to all nations, should form the core of the post-2015 agenda. As such, the General Assembly (GA) established in January 2013 an intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) to steer the formulation of the SDGs. Six Arab countries are members of the OWG: Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates. From March 2013 to February 2014, the OWG undertook a stock-taking phase and subsequently embarked on a consensus building phase geared at the preparation of an SDG proposal to be submitted to the 68<sup>th</sup> GA session in September 2014 for their consideration and appropriate action. Furthermore, the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was established as another outcome of Rio+20 to provide political leadership and guidance for sustainable development and constitute a forum for reviewing commitments and objectives related to sustainable development.

Within this overall context, and building on the consultative process that the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) has been undertaking, the present document was prepared by ESCWA as an Arab regional contribution to the on-going inter-governmental efforts to formulate the SDGs (See Box 1 for a highlight of the consultative process). Specifically, the paper proposes a set of SDGs that work for the Arab region and reflect regional development imperatives. It is envisioned that this document will help Arab countries in their engagement in international negotiations that will shape the SDGs within 2014 -2015, to ensure that the perspective and priorities of the Arab region are adequately reflected. It comes out at a timely moment when the OWG is preparing to embark on negotiating the SDGs proposal.

As such, the target audience for this document is primarily the Arab country members of the OWG, and by extension all the Arab countries as members of the GA which will endorse the OWG's proposal in September 2015 and participate in HLPF discussions. More broadly, it is hoped that the document will also inform the OWG and the GA members from beyond the region. In addition, it is intended for the document to inform the League of Arab States (through the Arab Social Affairs Council and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment) and the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, given the potential for 'cross-fertilization' with LAS-supported programmes including the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development that is currently under preparation with ESCWA support. Indeed, the SDGs will form one of the monitoring frameworks of the Strategic Framework.

The original version of this document was presented and discussed at the first Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD), which was organized by ESCWA and partners<sup>3</sup> in Amman during the period 2-4 April 2014. The AFSD is envisioned to become a leading mechanism for promoting an integrated and balanced approach to the various dimensions of sustainable development at the regional level and providing regional perspectives to the global agenda of the HLPF. This first time organization of the Forum presented an occasion for member countries to also

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<sup>3</sup> The Forum was organized in cooperation between ESCWA, the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Program, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and the Ministry of Environment in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

prepare for the Annual Ministerial Review meeting of 2014, which will be held during the next ECOSOC session in late June/early July 2014. As such, AFSD presented an opportunity to take stock of the challenges Arab countries are facing in meeting the MDGs and discuss means of sustaining development gains in the future. Participants in the AFSD provided comments on the document which were considered by ESCWA in the preparation of this revised proposal. The revised version will be submitted for discussion at the conference on “Sustainable Development Priorities in the Arab Region for Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals”, which is being organized by the Social Affairs Sector at LAS during the period 10-11 May 2014 in Amman.

## **II. Methodology and conceptual framework**

The Arab region comprises a widely diverse group of countries in terms of economic, demographic and natural resources and as such, it can be perceived as a ‘miniature’ model of the world. The current SDG proposal, while primarily reflecting regional priorities and considerations, will therefore have universal applicability. This being said, it is not expected that all targets will be equally relevant to all Arab countries, such as some of the targets related to food, water and energy issues. However, all Arab countries are definitely concerned and would benefit directly or indirectly from the achievement of these goals.

It is worth cautioning the readers that it is not intended for the set of proposed SDGs to be exhaustive, but rather to highlight a focused set of regional priorities based on a critical review of goals and targets proposed by the global community in terms of their suitability for the Arab region and their potential positive spill-over effects. Indeed, it is not expected that the SDGs can – or will attempt to – capture and address comprehensively all global sustainable development challenges, and it is not recommended nor feasible to reduce sustainable development into a narrow set of goals.

The document was prepared by ESCWA to reflect the outcomes of the Arab consultative processes undertaken by ESCWA and partners over the past couple of years on post-2015 and SDGs and which involved a wide range of stakeholders including government representatives, experts, civil society organizations and UN agencies (See box 1 for a highlight of the consultative process). Furthermore, the document is based on a set of background papers that have been prepared to take stock of the international post-2015/SDGs proposals and discussions and the regional context (See Annex A for a list of these background papers). The proposed SDGs and their targets are a reflection of the cumulated experience and knowledge of:

- a) The importance of integrating the various pillars of sustainable development within the SDGs, a concept which is universally agreed upon by the international community;
- b) Development objectives that can feasibly be implemented in the Arab region in the next couple of decades; As such, the proposed SDGs are ambitious yet can be adopted and executed nationally, if supporting global and regional environments are available;
- c) Goals that can possibly be adopted globally, taking into consideration discussions at the OWG;
- d) The need to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs in the Arab region, based on the latest assessment of progress achieved so far and remaining gaps; and
- e) Inter-linkages and synergies between different goals and targets and the need to apply a nexus perspective where individual goals/targets reinforce each other; This being said, the proposed goals and targets constitute a balanced mix of outcome and process-based developmental objectives, which ensures that the goals provide for adequate national policy space and also capture the big picture.

### Box 1. Highlights of the Arab Consultative Process on Post-2015 and SDGs

ESCWA and its partners conducted a series of consultations with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in 2013-2014 to help distill a regional perspective on the Post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs. The below mentioned events are a partial listing of meetings, some of which resulted in declarations and outcome documents that fed into the global process.

- Arab Regional CSO Consultative Meeting on Post-2015 Agenda (3/2013, Beirut);
- UNDG Arab Development Forum: Priorities for the Post-2015 Agenda in the Arab Region (4/2013, Amman);
- SDGs consultative session during the Regional Rio+20 Implementation Meeting (5/2013, Dubai);<sup>4</sup>
- SDGs discussions during the updating of the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region (8/2013, Amman);
- Consultations on the development of a Green Economy Investment Roadmap as a tool to operationalize sustainable development programmes in the region (8/2013, Amman);
- Arab Expert Consultation Meeting on SDGs (11/2013, Tunis);
- Post-2015 discussion during the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee for Women (12/2013, Kuwait);
- Youth Empowerment in Post-2015 Agenda (12/2013, Tunis);
- The Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development (4/2014, Amman) which served as the regional preparatory meeting for the next sessions of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), both of which will focus on lessons from the MDGs and prospects for post-2015/SDGs.

The process is still continuing and notable milestones in 2014 include:

- Conference on “Sustainable Development Priorities in the Arab Region for Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals” and the third session of the Arab Social Affairs Council (5/2014), which will discuss this document in preparation for its submission to the next Arab Economic and Social Development Summit (1/2015, Tunis);
- Special session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (5/2014), which will review the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development in preparation for its submission to the above-mentioned Arab Summit.

The selection of the goals and targets is framed by global principles as embodied in the Millennium Declaration, the Rio principles (notably the concept of common but differentiated responsibilities), and the Rio+20 outcome document. The five transformative shifts underscored in the report of the High-Level Panel (HLP) of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda<sup>5</sup> were taken into account, in addition to other relevant key UN documents.

<sup>4</sup> The meeting resulted in the Dubai Document which called for the SDGs to give due consideration to international peace and security, poverty eradication, and the sectors of food, energy, water, transportation, the reduction of land degradation, drought and desertification, the maintenance of biodiversity, disaster reduction and emergency preparedness, and waste management (Document available on the meeting webpage at <http://www.escwa.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=2044E>).

<sup>5</sup> A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (Available at <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>). The five transformative shifts are: Leave no

Regionally, the selection of the goals and targets was guided by the priorities and challenges included in the outcomes of Arab Economic and Social Development Summits, notably the Riyadh Declaration of 2013. It takes into account messages emanating from recent key regional development publications, notably The Arab MDG Report 2013 which was jointly produced by the League of Arab States and the United Nations,<sup>6</sup> Arab Integration: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Development Imperative,<sup>7</sup> and A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda.<sup>8</sup>

The document is based on the premise that the ultimate objective of any development intervention is the achievement of human well-being in accordance with human rights principles and standards, and that development should be underpinned by the principles of equality and sustainability. As such, the proposed goals and targets pursue the enjoyment of the benefits of development by all, including issues of access, affordability, quality, equity, etc. within the natural resource limits of our one planet Earth.

As a priority conceptual issue, attempts have been made to integrate and balance as much as possible, between and within each of the goals, the three main pillars as embodied in the mainstream concept of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.<sup>9</sup> The political dimension of development has also been given prominence due to its relevance for the Arab region. Indeed, the proposal reflects the conviction that sustainable development can never be achieved without the prevalence of peace and stability. In the Arab region, the achievement of peace is tightly linked to the occupation of Palestine, which should be ended. In addition, and in acknowledgement of the importance of effective institutions as a basis upon which other development pillars can stand, efforts have been made to mainstream institutional issues across goals, in addition to devoting a specific goal to the topic.

ESCWA literature<sup>10</sup> has highlighted the prevalence of cultural factors that have constituted obstacles to development in a number of Arab countries. It is believed that culture is an important dimension of development which, if nurtured will reinforce the other dimensions. Culture can be seen to include two main elements, namely: a) knowledge and skills as accumulated through formal education but also through lifelong training; and b) values, attitudes and behaviors. Efforts have been made to mainstream these cultural elements into the different goals. For example, under education, focus was made on skills enhancement for all segments of society, in addition to increased research and development, in support of building knowledge. Achieving gender equality requires above all a change in culture to end all discriminatory practices, while the sustainability of land, energy and water also reflects the need for cultural change in improving efficiency and reducing waste.

It should be asserted that the SDGs should not open the door for any renegotiation or dilution of international agreements and global commitments that came out of previous major summits on sustainable development. On the contrary, the formulation of these goals and targets should provide global political impetus to build on previous commitments and seek to go beyond their achievement.

Finally, it is worthwhile noting that the present document has focused only on goals and targets and did not explore the indicators that would have to be used to monitor implementation in the future.

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one behind; Put sustainable development at the core; Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth; Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; Forge a new global partnership.

<sup>6</sup> UN and LAS 2013, Arab Millennium Development Goal Report 2013: Facing challenges and Looking Beyond 2015 (E/ESCWA/EDGD/2013/1)

<sup>7</sup> UN-ESCWA 2014, Arab Integration: A 21st Century Development Imperative (E/ESCWA/OES/2013/3)

<sup>8</sup> UN-ESCWA 2013, A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015: United Nations Development Agenda (E/ESCWA/OES/2013/2)

<sup>9</sup> See Cameron Allen, Reem Nejdawi and Jana El-Baba, 2013, SDG Priority Conceptual Issues: Towards an Arab Approach for the Sustainable Development Goals (Discussion paper submitted to the Arab Regional Consultative Dialogue on the Sustainable Development Goals, Tunisia, 18-19 November 2013).

<sup>10</sup> UN-ESCWA 2012, Arab Millennium Development Goals Report 2011: An Inclusive Approach to Development in a Time of Transition (E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/7)

As such, issues of data availability and collection, despite their importance, are outside the scope of this document and are left for a later stage.

### III. The Arab regional context and progress on the MDGs

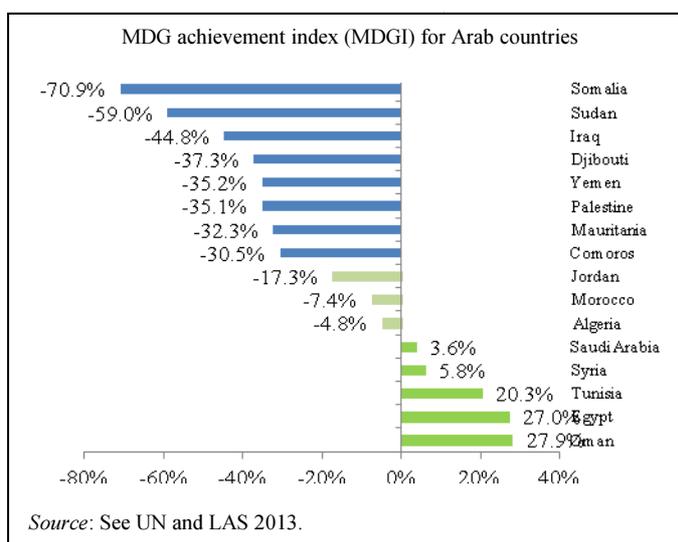
Popular demands voiced in a number of Arab countries during the civil protests of 2011 called for freedom, social justice and dignity. In some Arab countries, human rights and civil liberties were not respected and development challenges were not addressed for many decades.<sup>11</sup> As a result, injustice and socio-economic inequalities aggravated even further and became entrenched. Furthermore, the occupation of Palestine, the only remaining case of occupation in world modern history, added to development challenges in the region and fueled discord among the Arab countries.

It is commonly acknowledged that issues of freedom and justice represent part of the fueling motive behind the Arab uprisings. The economic development paradigm pursued in most Arab countries contributed to the grievances. Indeed, many Arab countries have followed the functions of rentier economies, mainly powered by revenues from oil exports in the oil-rich countries, and foreign aid and remittances in case of non-oil-rich countries. In addition, in some countries of the region, lack of strong and transparent institutions, corruption and nepotism increased income disparities, with businesses linked to political power reaping most of the fruits of growth. The situation got worse due to a growing sense among the people, especially the youth, that growth revenues were not reinvested or redistributed equitably across the different segments of society. Rising inequalities, poverty, unemployment and injustice may have contributed to the creation of an incubation environment for radicalism and sectarian discord.

The region is now strife-torn with conflicts taking place in many Arab countries, and sectarian tensions and terrorist acts have heightened. The flows of internally displaced persons and refugees further add to an unstable and fragile situation, with high risk of negative spillovers.

The Arab country population now counts over 360 million persons.<sup>12</sup> This demographic mass, with a relatively high proportion of young people, represents an opportunity that remains untapped. Furthermore, the Arab region has missed opportunities that could be offered by regional integration. Attempts at integration have been restricted to narrow economic domains and did not spread over all Arab countries.<sup>13</sup>

While the potential for regional integration is supported by common historical, cultural and spiritual heritage and geographic proximity, the Arab region is characterized by strong heterogeneity on several fronts. In particular, the region includes some of the countries with the highest per capita income in the world as well as some of the poorest countries in the world. These differences are also noticeable in terms of uneven progress of the



<sup>11</sup> UN-ESCWA 2014

<sup>12</sup> According to the World Bank's World Development Indicators for 2012, including all the 22 Arab countries members of the League of Arab States.

<sup>13</sup> UN-ESCWA 2014

MDGs across countries and within sub-regions.<sup>14</sup> Some Arab countries have thus recorded strong progress in most indicators, while other countries have shown limited or no progress. The LDCs are unlikely to achieve the MDGs by the year 2015 due to conflict and lasting wars, lack of resources and weak basic infrastructure.

The main message of the Arab MDG report 2013 is that the region has failed to transform its wealth into a commensurate improvement in human wellbeing for all its member countries. Thus, while the region has scored major achievements in enrolment and gender parity in education, it still lags behind on many MDG targets, particularly on hunger, access to safe drinking water as well as reduction of maternal and infant mortality, especially in the LDCs. This is clearly highlighted by the MDG achievement index (MDGI)<sup>15</sup> which summarizes the MDG progress, by evaluating the discrepancy between the actual and targeted MDG performance.

Progress towards the MDGs has also been unequal within countries as aggregate numbers hide large inequalities, for example between rich and poor, rural and urban, and men and women.

The region has the lowest freshwater availability per capita of any region of the world combined with declining availability of arable land, land degradation and worsening climate change impacts which raise serious questions with regard to food security. Food deficits are largely bridged by imports and over-exploitation of finite resources which leaves the region vulnerable to natural and economic shocks. While energy resources such as oil and gas have become embedded as the backbone of regional trade and production, not all countries in the Arab region are energy rich. Energy security is also becoming a serious concern for oil-importing countries in the region due to volatile and increasing oil prices, as well as inefficiencies in use and production.<sup>16</sup>

The weak poverty-employment-growth nexus still lies at the heart of development challenges facing low and middle income countries in the region. Economic growth must also be accompanied by good governance and environmental sustainability. Unfortunately, the lack of good governance has led the Arab region to squander considerable oil wealth with unsustainable patterns of production, pricing and consumption that have created some of the highest levels of energy intensity per dollar of GDP in the world. Inadequate natural resources management policies have hindered any serious scientific research endeavor in renewable energy and in some countries like Yemen it has led to rapid depletion of under-ground water resources. Thus the mismanagement of natural resources in Arab countries provides the strongest example of compounded failures in governance and economic policy.<sup>17</sup>

In sum, the region has to address persistent challenges from the MDGs lens such as poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and undernourishment, gender disparities, child and maternal mortality, access to safe drinking water and the gap between rural and urban areas as well as between the rich and poor. The MDGs framework, however, doesn't take into account quality of achievements, such as quality education and health services that are imperative for improving quality of life. Particularly, governance was missing in the MDGs and the importance of good governance for development is more than clear with examples of the countries affected by the 'Arab Spring'. Therefore, in addition to addressing the unfinished business of the MDGs which remain global priorities, any post-2015 agenda for the region must respond to the emerging needs and challenges in an integrated approach that combines economic, social and environmental

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<sup>14</sup> For a relevant analysis of MDGs, the League of Arab States and the United Nations have agreed on the following regional classification of Arab countries: *the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC)*: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; *the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)*: Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen; *Maghreb*: Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia; *Mashreq*: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic. See UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>15</sup> See detail about the index in UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Allen et al 2013.

<sup>17</sup> UNDP 2011, Arab Development Challenges Report 2011: Towards the Developmental State in the Arab Region. Cairo: UNDP Regional Centre for Arab States.

sustainability with principles of good governance, human rights and equality.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the Arab countries will benefit from greater regional integration along with fostering global partnerships for development. All these issues are discussed in the sections below.

## IV. Key challenges and priorities in the Arab region

### A. Poverty and inequalities

Extreme poverty, measured by the proportion of people whose income is less than US \$1.25 a day, is relatively low in the Arab region, but the region will fail in meeting the MDG target by 2015.<sup>19</sup> Between 1990 and 2010, extreme poverty decreased from 5.5 percent to 4.1 percent, but it has increased to 7.4 per cent in 2012.<sup>20</sup> The increase in poverty between 2010 and 2012 is noticeable in the Mashreq sub-region, which indicates the immediate impact of conflicts and political instabilities. In the LDCs, extreme poverty is highest at 21.6 percent in 2012, increasing from 13.9 percent in 1990. Further, there is a high concentration of people living on income between \$1.25 and \$3 a day in the Arab region, as seen by the sharp jump in the poverty rate if the poverty line is shifted. In fact, national poverty assessments by individual countries show a much higher rate of poverty than that indicated by the globally fixed poverty line of \$1.25.<sup>21</sup>

The performance of the Arab region in terms of its average economic growth of about 2 per cent over the last three decades and trends of poverty and undernourishment during the same period shows a lack of interconnection. This indicates the unequal distribution of developmental gains and that the growth processes have been generally exclusionary, which may undermine political and social stability. For example, in Egypt, economic growth has been anti-poor as well as anti-middle class during the decade that led up to the 2011 revolution.<sup>22</sup>

Inequalities in various forms still continue to threaten development achievements and social cohesion in the region. While income inequalities in the Arab region are relatively moderate, according to the Gini coefficient, this does not reflect reality on the ground. Current MDG monitoring is done on the national, regional and global levels, which conceals inequalities at sub-national levels and other forms of inequalities. Where data are broken down—such as by income group, urban and rural areas, by age or disability, or by ethnic group or gender—the MDG indicators often show some groups are lagging far behind. A recent ESCWA study of the Arab region shed light on multiple polarizations at the regional, national, city and intercity levels<sup>23</sup> and calls for stronger efforts to address these.

Social protection in the Arab region is neither universal nor comprehensive or rights-based. Three quarters of the population in the region do not receive any social transfers, while the other quarter is covered by the social insurance and social assistance within the formal economy.<sup>24</sup> In many Arab countries, subsidies (food and fuel) represent a large portion of government expenditure, representing 3-14 per cent of GDP, but most benefits are captured by the well-to-do population.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Khalid Abu-Ismaïl, Aljaz Kuncic, Naren Prasad and Niranjana Sarangi, 2014, An Arab Perspective on the Post 2015 Agenda: National targets, regional priorities and global goals.

<sup>19</sup> UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>20</sup> The regional/sub-regional estimates are for the common set of countries for which data are available in 1990 and 2012. Taking into account additional countries for which the latest data are available, such as Iraq and Sudan, the incidence of extreme poverty for the region increases to 8.2 per cent.

<sup>21</sup> See also UNDP 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Abu-Ismaïl and Sarangi 2013. A New Approach to Measuring the Middle Class: EGYPT. ESCWA Working Paper No. 2. E/ESCWA/EDGD/2013/WP.2.

<sup>23</sup> UN-ESCWA 2011. Bridging the Urban Divide in the ESCWA Region: Towards Inclusive Cities. E/ESCWA/SDD/2011/1.

<sup>24</sup> World Bank 2012.

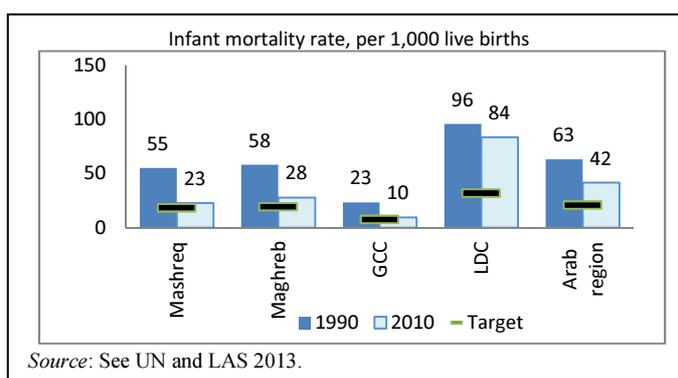
<sup>25</sup> Fattouh and El-Katiri 2012.

There is a need for assessment of the subsidies system, particularly fuel subsidy, and its design in order for better policy impact on the target population. This is also likely to help promote better resource allocation by the governments while taking into consideration the impact on the most vulnerable groups.

**Action areas:** There is a need in the Arab region to develop more precise measures of poverty and inequality, in addition to strengthening efforts to reduce poverty. Instead of a fixed international poverty line, assigning different poverty lines to different country groupings on the basis of their standard of living, such as level of expenditure per capita can provide better information about the poverty situation.<sup>26</sup> Greater emphasis must be put on making the economic growth processes more inclusive and more sustainable, which must promote participation and benefit sharing of growth equitably across all sections of society without discounting for the future generations and without damaging the natural resource base and ecosystem services upon which humanity depends. A comprehensive social protection system<sup>27</sup> is much needed, which can protect the poor and the vulnerable, including the persons with disabilities, against natural and human-induced shocks, disaster risks and economic insecurities.

## B. Health

Health is an outcome and an indicator of sustainable development. The poorer parts of the Arab region continue to be deprived of access to essential health services, leading to high prevalence of infant and child mortality as well as maternal mortality. Economic growth in the region has not been translated to access to better health care facilities and the disparities between countries in access to health services are widening.



Mashreq, Maghreb and GCC countries have all reduced infant mortality rates (IMR) by more than 50 per cent and the 2015 target is within reach. However, the LDCs lag far behind with only a 13 per cent reduction in the last two decades. A similar trend is also noted in case of child mortality under the age five.<sup>28</sup> Due to still high infant mortality rates in the LDCs, the region's progress on infant mortality is much slower than required to meet the MDG target in 2015.

High prevalence of maternal mortality in LDCs, as compared to other sub-regions, is yet another extreme form of deprivation and inequality in access to health and maternal care services. Between 1990 and 2010, maternal mortality rates declined more than 60 per cent in the Mashreq and Maghreb sub-regions; GCC countries have made remarkable achievements, their progress being better than the developed regions. On the contrary, the LDCs register 676 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010<sup>29</sup> and must be urgently supported for greater investment in health services.<sup>30</sup>

In the Arab region, the quality of health services is deteriorating and out-of-pocket spending is increasing, which further reduces access for the poor. In general, out-of-pocket expenditure of people in the Arab region is around 50 per cent of their total health expenditure, as against the

<sup>26</sup> See background paper by Abu-Ismaïl et al (2014)

<sup>27</sup> See the ILO Recommendation on national social protection floor (ILO 2012)

<sup>28</sup> See UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>29</sup> See UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Investing in Maternal Health, Learning from Malaysia and Sri Lanka, World Bank 2003

world average of around 18 per cent.<sup>31</sup> Out-of-pocket spending is high because of lack of coverage and the low quality of state provided medical services, therefore people preferring private care providers.<sup>32</sup>

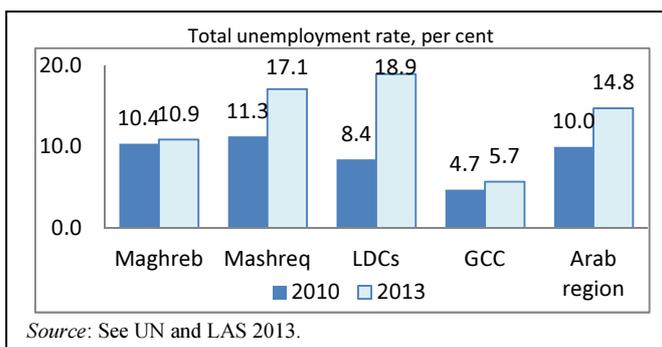
In Arab countries, 45.1 per cent of adults are obese, which indicates double burden of malnutrition.<sup>33</sup> In richer parts of the Arab region unhealthy habits are on the rise such as smoking, sedentary life, unhealthy eating habits etc., which often lead to chronic illnesses such as those of the cardiovascular system, diabetes among others.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, strong evidence is emerging linking environmental pollution and ecological degradation to non-communicable diseases such as cancer and cardio-vascular diseases.

Infectious diseases are a major health challenge in the poorest Arab countries and in situations of conflicts and crises when refugees live in poor environmental conditions. Among the major infectious diseases, tuberculosis incidence rate is falling slowly in the region, but the rate remains high in the LDCs. Five LDCs of the region face serious health concerns related to Malaria.<sup>35</sup> Some parts of the region are also facing a growing threat of hepatitis B and C. Statistics have also shown a rise in the number of new HIV/AIDS infections in the Arab region, which calls for serious action within the Arab Strategic Framework for the Response to HIV and AIDS.<sup>36</sup>

**Action areas:** It is important for Countries in the Arab region to provide increased access to quality health care services, including health care services for reproductive health, especially for the poor. Reducing infant and maternal deaths, particularly in the LDCs, and increasing vaccination coverage as well as reducing the burden of diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS and diseases related with modern sedentary life-style are pre-conditions for ensuring healthy life. Prevention of both infectious and chronic diseases is cheaper than treating them after they are full blown.<sup>37</sup> It is essential to adopt an integrated public health approach which recognizes the complex interactions between social, environmental, ecological and health factors. Stronger advocacy on the relationship between environment and health can help promote environmental protection action.

### C. Unemployment

One of the main driving forces behind the Tunisian and Egyptian revolution of 2010-2011 was lack of decent job opportunities especially among the youth. Economic policies in the region were inadequate in absorbing people entering the labour market and it continues, as witnessed by the increasing unemployment rates reaching 15 per cent in 2013. The LDCs and Mashreq countries have especially very high unemployment rates of 19 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. As a result of the economic and political situation in some countries,



<sup>31</sup> World Bank 2013.

<sup>32</sup> UN-ESCWA 2011.

<sup>33</sup> See UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Hanan F Abdul Rahim et al 2014, Non-communicable diseases in the Arab world. The Lancet, Volume 383, Issue 9914, Pages 356 - 367, 25 January 2014

<sup>35</sup> UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>36</sup> The Arab Strategic Framework for the Response to HIV and AIDS (2014-2020) was endorsed by the Council of Arab Ministers of Health at their 41<sup>st</sup> regular session in March 2014. See UNAIDS article at <http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2014/march/20140317arabaidstrategy>.

<sup>37</sup> Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

labour market conditions have further deteriorated and unemployment soared, particularly for the more educated youth. For example, in Tunisia, 32 per cent of those with a university degree are unemployed and more so for female at 44 per cent in 2011.<sup>38</sup> Youth unemployment in the Arab region is among the highest in the world where one youth in four is unemployed. Female youth unemployment in the region is even worse at around 40 per cent.

Gains in women's education did not significantly raise their participation in the formal labour force in the Arab region. Female labour force participation rate is the lowest among all regions and half the global average of 51 per cent. Similarly, women's employment-to-population ratio remained the lowest among all regions and much lower than the world average though it has increased slowly, from 16 per cent in 1991 to 19 per cent in 2011.

Public investment has declined during the 1990s, in the economic reform era, assuming that the private sector would fill in the gap. However, private investment did not meet the expectations and the FDI favoured mining and real estate sectors which does not create sufficient jobs.

Most Arab countries in the region face severe challenge in job creation. According to an estimate for the non-GCC countries, in order for countries of the region to reach full employment by 2030, they have to create ninety two million jobs.<sup>39</sup> The estimate is based on the assumption that women's labour force participation rate increases to 35 per cent by 2030, taking into account the current increasing trend in the region. The cost of job creation is an estimated \$220 billion average annual investment, which is approximately 50 per cent of the GDP of these countries in 2009. The required rate of investment is substantially higher for LDCs at around 100 per cent of GDP, which is impossible to realize unless external assistance is provided.<sup>40</sup>

Child labour is still a concern in the Arab region though it is lower among the developing regions. According to latest estimates by ILO, about 9.2 million children (5-17 years) are working.<sup>41</sup> However, the actual number of child labourers may be much higher because of their predominance in the informal sector, thus making it difficult to capture.

**Action areas:** An effective approach for job creation would include stimulating labour demand, such as by encouraging economic sectors most likely to generate more jobs in both public and private sectors, but especially in the private sector. This would require greater productive investment, for which the public sector must take a forward step and create enabling conditions to facilitate private investment as well as flow of foreign direct investment. Greater diversification of the economies through encouraging manufacturing as well as promoting rural non-farm activities is a critical area of policy intervention. In addition, there is a need to support enabling market conditions to create greater opportunities for women and youth employment, given that unemployment rates for Arab women and youth are highest in the world. However, job creation should not just focus on absolute numbers, but rather to the linkage between job creation and inclusive and sustainable development.

## D. Gender inequality

Improvements have been made in the Arab region in terms of gender equality in the areas of health and education, as exemplified by the increase in women's life expectancy and the decrease in maternal mortality rates, in addition to improvement in women's literacy rates and access to all educational levels. However, inequalities between men and women continue to persist in the economic, political and legal spheres. Indeed, women tend to earn less than men for similar jobs, benefit much less than men from employment opportunities, and social and economic resources

<sup>38</sup> Institut Tunisien de la Compétitivité et des Études Quantitatives, 2012

<sup>39</sup> UNDP 2011

<sup>40</sup> UNDP 2011

<sup>41</sup> The figure refers to Middle East and North Africa region, see ILO 2013.

and legal systems, which are discriminatory. Women's labour force participation rate in the Arab region reached only 26 per cent in 2010, which is the lowest rate among all regions and half the global average of 51 per cent. Paid jobs for women outside the agricultural sector in the Arab region decreased from 18 to 16.8 per cent during 1990-2010. Women are also paid less on average than men.<sup>42</sup>

Despite substantial improvement in relative terms during the past decade, the participation of women in parliament and other political activities remains low compared to world figures and national women machineries have not risen to the effective role expected from them as an essential stakeholder in development. The role of gender equality in the achievement of all development goals cannot be underestimated. Structural changes are needed in the Arab countries to empower women beyond education.

Women in the Arab region are under-represented in senior management positions, such as legislators, senior officials and managers (less than 10 per cent for the region compared to around 25 per cent globally).

One in seven girls in the Arab region marries before reaching adulthood.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, rates of early marriage are in increase among refugee population in the region, with over 50% of Syrian women refugees reported to be married before age 18.<sup>44</sup> Child marriage is above all a human rights violation. Furthermore, girls who marry early are more prone to quit school and bear children early, and as a result they do not participate adequately in economic life. Furthermore, early marriage is believed to expose girls to spousal violence.

Violence against girls and women remains an important and inadequately addressed issue in the Arab region, which is deterring women and girls from fully participating in all aspects of society.<sup>45</sup> Despite the active role played by civil society organizations and the various national strategic interventions adopted in some Arab countries, violence against women remains a social taboo, information is lacking, and the legislative framework addressing this issue remain fragmented with contradictory sources of legislation allowing impunity for the perpetrators of domestic violence.

Gender inequalities also exist in terms of access to environmental resources for livelihoods, including land tenure, with women typically receiving a lower share. In spite of that, the burden of securing water, food and shelter often falls upon women, especially in the LDCs.

**Action areas:** Ensuring gender equality is an imperative element for development in the region and gender perspectives must be mainstreamed in all areas of sustainable development. Commitment at all levels is needed, at the national government level but also at the local and individual levels, to promote women's voice, leadership and participation, by stimulating transformative changes in three core areas: a) freedom from violence for women and girls; b) preventing the early marriage of girls; and c) strengthening women's capabilities and equal access to resources; and ensuring women's voice, leadership and participation.

## E. Ineffective institutions

The Arab uprisings have shown that development and economic growth should not be solely concerned with wealth creation, but also with wealth distribution and participation through

<sup>42</sup> UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Shaimaa Ibrahim, May 2013, Ending child marriage in the Arab Region (Population Reference Bureau Policy Brief)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>, p.29

<sup>45</sup> UN-ESCWA 2013, Combating domestic violence against women and girls: Policies to empower women in the Arab region (E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/4)

democratic governance. The uprisings have heightened the expectations of Arab citizens in terms of effective, transparent and accountable public institutions that are responsive to their needs. Building capable institutions faces numerous challenges in the Arab region, one of which is that institutions have become emptied of capable cadres. Furthermore, there is further need to expand the space of freedom provided to Arab populations and Arab civil society organizations to enable them to become active stakeholders.

Measuring governance is difficult. There is no unique indicator which can capture the true strength of governance in all its dimensions and most of them are subjective. However, international organisations have made efforts in measuring proxy indicators of governance. One such indicator is the voice and accountability index, by the World Bank. Arab countries undergoing political transitions rank low in terms of voice and accountability. As a whole, the Arab region lags behind other regions in most governance indicators, which indicates a combination of national wealth and poor governance. Another indicator, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), assesses “democracy status” in various countries on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the best) according to five criteria (stateness, political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, and political and social integration). All the Arab countries for which BTI data was available (17 Arab countries) ranked below the mark of 6.2 in 2012.<sup>46</sup>

**Action areas:** The establishment of capable and effective institutions in the Arab region is critically needed to create a stable foundation for societies to live in peace and stability. In particular, individuals in the Arab countries need to regain trust in their governments and therefore it is important to enhance accountability and transparency of public budgets such as through leveraging information and communication technology (ICT) and promoting e-government services, combat corruption and favouritism, and guarantee the independence of the judiciary. In addition, immediate reform priorities could include constitution-building, free and fair elections, political participation and instituting transitional justice mechanisms to move beyond the past towards nation-building.<sup>47</sup> The achievement of sustainable development requires the integration of the environment within institutional frameworks at both regional and national levels.

## F. Education

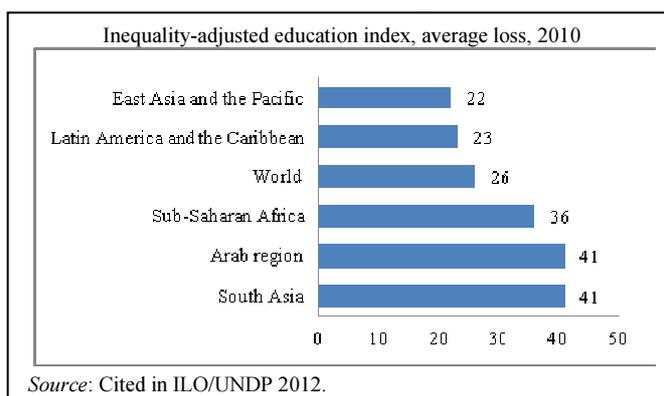
The Arab countries have invested in expanding primary and secondary education historically, which has resulted in impressive enrolment rates and also increase in average years of schooling for adults (15 years and older) from 1.3 years in 1960 to 5.4 in the 2000s. Many countries in the region continue to increase spending on education, which has reached above 5 per cent of their GDP in 2010. However, quality of education, if one may look at it in terms of student’s performance in relation to international benchmarks or linkage between education and labour market outcomes, the results are not satisfactory. The increasing cost of education also negatively affects the school completion rates for primary as well as secondary.

Primary school enrolment increased in the Arab region, and also gender parity in enrolment, but they don’t necessarily mean that children are learning or are present in the classrooms on a daily basis. Importantly, the education standard lags behind other countries with international standards. An assessment by the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)* shows that most Arab countries are lagging behind the international averages. None of the 14 Arab countries that participated in the assessment managed to score 500 as the international achievement level. Similarly, another assessment known as the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* showed also low levels of performance.

<sup>46</sup> As compiled by ESCWA in the Social Development Bulletin, Volume 4, Issue 2.

<sup>47</sup> UNDP 2011.

While the region had done fairly well in terms of increasing primary enrollment, the high cost of education has been a strong barrier for primary completion rate, measured by the gross intake rate to the last grade of primary school, especially among the poor families. Early marriage of girls and insecurities in some parts of the region also negatively affect completion rates. Despite strong progress in many countries, even in LDCs, an enormous effort is needed to reach the universal primary education goal by 2015. In addition, a lack of quality education leads to skills deficiency in the labour markets, especially for the youth.<sup>48</sup>



There is also evidence of inequalities within income groups where students from poor background perform lower than those with richer background. The latter can afford private schools and tutors which again contribute to widening inequality between the rich and poor students in their performance. The inequality adjustment education index, by UNDP, shows that the average loss of education achievement due to inequality in the Arab region is 41 percent, which is higher than all other developing regions and on equal par with South Asia.<sup>49</sup>

**Action areas:** There is a need in the Arab region to ensure equal opportunity of education for all so that children, girls and boys, especially from the poor families, can complete their education cycle for both primary and secondary levels. Ensuring quality education requires developing strong monitoring mechanisms in the education system, including performance assessments using international benchmarks. In addition, investments in skill training programmes and vocational education for the youth, elderly and persons with disabilities is extremely important to develop a skilled labour force that can respond to the labour market situation. Increasing access to higher education such as ICT, entrepreneurship and research and development in technology is also an important priority for the countries of the region to better address the needs as well as to help creating a knowledge economy. It is important to adopt educational curricula that instill the principles of sustainable development and sustainable consumption and production patterns.

## G. International cooperation for trade, technology and finance

The current macroeconomic and fiscal situation of the Arab countries, especially those in political instability is daunting. Economic growth has plummeted, fiscal accounts have deteriorated, and debt levels have increased in these countries, and it has affected all the countries of the region in varying degrees, either directly or indirectly.

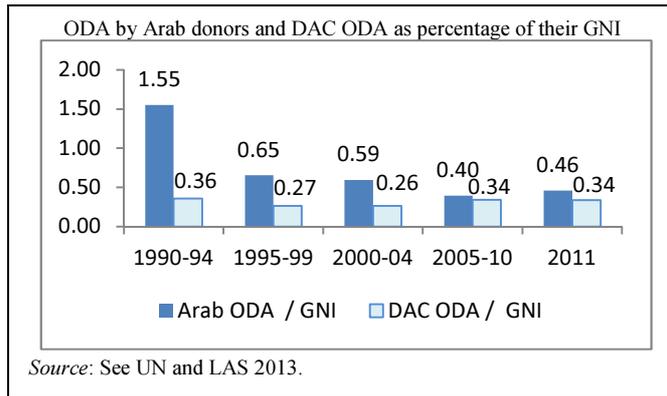
Economic activity remained at low levels and real GDP declined in the countries most affected by political instability. Government revenue had fallen and, with increasing government expenditure during the uprisings in order to satisfy the demands of the protestors in terms of wage increase, subsidies, and increased social assistance; government fiscal balance has deteriorated over the recent years. The fiscal balance for the Arab region was -1.5 per cent of GDP in 2000-10, which further deteriorated to -2.6 per cent in the 2011-12 period. As a result of increasing fiscal deficits,

<sup>48</sup> ILO/UNDP 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in ILO/ UNDP 2012.

there has been increasing pressure on the government debt. The public debt is relatively high at 57 per cent of GDP for the Arab region.<sup>50</sup>

Overseas development assistance (ODA) to the Arab region has fallen short of commitments and has also been highly volatile, which further constrains the available fiscal space in the LDCs and MICs. In addition, addressing persisting challenges such as climate change,



unemployment, peace and security requires access to new global financing mechanisms as well as access to cleaner technology. According to the 'common but differentiated responsibility' Rio principle, which is recognized by all major summits on sustainable development, and also by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the countries with greater historical responsibility in contributing to the earth's environmental problems, such as the developed countries of today, have a greater obligation to act. Thus, there is a need for greater commitment and accountability by the advanced countries to support the LDCs and other developing countries in addressing the development deficits. However, this cannot and should not be used as a reason for inaction at the regional level.

Arab countries in general have less trade barriers as the countries in the region have undertaken trade liberalisation measures. However, there are several restrictions and quotas that still don't favour exports from the region to developed countries. In addition, several countries in the region face trade sanctions on goods and services for general use from their major trading partners.

International mechanisms governing intellectual property rights (IPRs) and technology transfer can result in high costs for technology access, which will negatively affect poor countries and put barriers to their development. This is particularly important for the region in relation to two areas namely: access to green technology including climate change mitigation and adaption technologies, and life-saving and essential medicines. The last two decades have seen an increase in patenting in most technology areas, contributed by international agreements such as the WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreement and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) patent cooperation treaty (PCT). For example, only five countries account for almost 80 per cent of all claimed priority patents in clean energy technologies.<sup>51</sup>

Importantly, the Arab region has missed several opportunities that could be offered by Arab regional integration. The Arab countries share common historical and cultural heritage and geographic proximity. The countries recognized the importance of establishing a strong and resilient bloc that protects the independence and strengthens the economies, and signed agreements to safeguard the integrity and security as well as to establish Arab economic unity in the middle of the twentieth century. Six decades have passed, and yet Arab countries have achieved only a few of their provisions.<sup>52</sup> Attempts at integration have been restricted to narrow economic domains and did not spread over wider areas of cooperation.

<sup>50</sup> Based on World Bank 2013 (World Development Indicators).

<sup>51</sup> UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), the European Patent Office (EPO) and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD). 2010. *Patents and clean energy: Bridging the gap between evidence and policy*. UNEP, EPO and ICTSD

<sup>52</sup> ESCWA - Arab Regional Integration Report 2014.

**Action areas:** Regional and global donors should stand by commitments to support countries' development needs based on the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). Constrained by domestic fiscal space, the LDCs and middle income countries must mobilize international support through international aid, FDI, trade, role of private sector and eventually through remittances. Aid may not be enough to achieve the development objectives. Partnership relationships might be needed to provide support to countries in need. In addition, domestic resource mobilization through taxation and subsidy reforms also needs to be considered, taking into consideration the interests of the marginalized groups. The role of the private sector in achieving development goals is also becoming increasingly important and complementary to that of the public sector. While designing domestic policies for stronger economies, the Arab countries have much to benefit from greater regional integration, whether economically, socially or culturally. Globally, there is a greater need for international mechanisms to take into account consideration of poor and developing countries to provide broader access to environmentally sound technology as well as essential and life-saving drugs as part of public good provision rather than just for commercial gains.

## H. Cities, housing and infrastructure

The Arab population has tripled over the last 40 years and over half of them now live in cities. The urbanization trend is projected to increase and 2050 is expected to witness a doubling of Arab urban population. The increase in urban population is typically accompanied by an expansion of the cities' geographic areas, which sometimes occurs at the expense of cultural and natural heritage, posing a threat to Arab identity.<sup>53</sup> Rapid urbanization is expected to increase vulnerability to natural disasters such as droughts, floods, earthquakes and storms. More than 37 million inhabitants in the Arab region were affected by natural disasters, and incurred losses exceeding \$20 billion during the period 1980-2008.<sup>54</sup> In 2010, an Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted.<sup>55</sup>

In some countries, the influx of refugees from neighbouring countries due to conflict (such as Syrian refugees influx to Jordan and Lebanon) has impacted social cohesion in some areas and violations of the human rights of refugees have been reported.<sup>56</sup> In addition, refugee influx has put additional pressures to ensure access to already scarce water resources and other services in both urban and rural contexts. In fact, the Arab region had 7.4 million refugees in 2010, 9.8 million internally displaced and 15 million migrant workers from outside the region.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, and despite significant improvements in the Arab region to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities, they continue to face substantial barriers in accessing health care services, education and employment, leading to lower literacy rates, poorer health outcomes, and heightened vulnerability to poverty and violence.<sup>58</sup>

There is a big pressure on governments to provide adequate and affordable housing and the infrastructure (water and sanitation, electricity, roads) needed to cater for the needs of a growing population. Furthermore, secondary cities lack the management capacities to cope with such expansion.<sup>59</sup> Existing water supply and wastewater systems would have to be upgraded and

<sup>53</sup> UN-Habitat, *The State of Arab Cities 2012: Challenges of Urban Transition* (Second Edition - December 2012).

<sup>54</sup> UNISDR, <http://www.unisdr.org/arabstates/activities>

<sup>55</sup> The Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020 was adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in 2010, and was subsequently approved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arab Development Summit in 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2014* ([http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2014\\_web\\_0.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2014_web_0.pdf)).

<sup>57</sup> UN-Habitat 2012.

<sup>58</sup> ESCWA-LAS Conference on the "Arab Decade for Persons with Disability and beyond: Enhancing the knowledge and policy infrastructure for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Arab Region" (Cairo, 30 - 31 October 2013)

<sup>59</sup> UN-Habitat 2012.

expanded, which is technically and financially difficult.<sup>60</sup> The needs of rural populations in terms of infrastructure faces a different set of challenges as the deployment of infrastructure into remote areas is typically costly and economically not rewarding over the short term, yet it is badly required if rural development is to be realized and agricultural activities are to grow. In view of the water shortage, water supply service interruptions have become frequent and intermittent supply patterns are common in many Arab countries.

The Arab MDG report 2013 showed that due to unregulated disposal of wastewater in many Arab countries, water resources and coastal ecosystems are polluted, which leads to major health issues for the population. About 28 per cent of urban residents reside in slums in the region, and in the LDCs more than two thirds of urban residents live in slums. There is thus a need for an integrated approach in designing and provisioning of quality social services, in order to address concerns of rural and urban areas while taking account of environmental sustainability.

While the collection rate of municipal solid waste in the region is fairly high, waste is inadequately

<b>Inclusion of disability in the SDGs</b>
<p>Disabled Peoples' International – Arab Office believes in the need to strive for a fair, equitable and inclusive world which is free of any negativity towards all people, including people with disability. The Office recommends this issue to be taken up by the post-2015 agenda through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adopting a new inclusive framework based on the rights enshrined in the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;</li> <li>- Ensuring the representation of persons with all types of disabilities throughout the stages of formulation of the global agenda for development, in addition to regional and national development plans;</li> <li>- Ensuring that all goals and targets are inclusive for people with disabilities;</li> <li>- Including specific goals targeting people with disabilities and people with special needs.</li> </ul> <p>Source: Recommendation of the Disabled Peoples' International – Arab Office's 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Assembly held during April 22-24, 2014 in Cairo.</p>

disposed of in open or uncontrolled dumpsites rather than sanitary landfills, leading to the pollution of soil, air and water bodies and causing a threat to health and the environment. On the other hand, the per capita solid waste generation rate in the Gulf countries is among the highest in the world.

Solid waste management falls within the realm of local authorities, who implement local plans. However, there is potential in several Arab countries for delegating more powers to municipalities. The authority of local governments in most Arab countries is undermined by highly

centralized governance structures and the roles of central and local governments are not coordinated.

There is a need in the Arab region for promoting sustainable transport, notably within large cities, in view of its importance in facilitating the movement of people and enabling economic activity in industry, commerce, tourism and agriculture. The sector consumes around 18 percent of primary energy in the Arab region<sup>61</sup> and produces air-polluting toxic gases, in addition to greenhouse gases. Demand for private cars is increasing in the Arab countries, triggered in part by limited availability of high-quality public transportation systems.

<sup>60</sup> ESCWA Water Development Report 5, Issues in Sustainable Water Resources Management and Water Services (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013/4).

<sup>61</sup> UN-ESCWA, 2011, Policies and Measures to Promote Sustainable Use of Energy in the Transport Sector in the ESCWA Region (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2011/2).

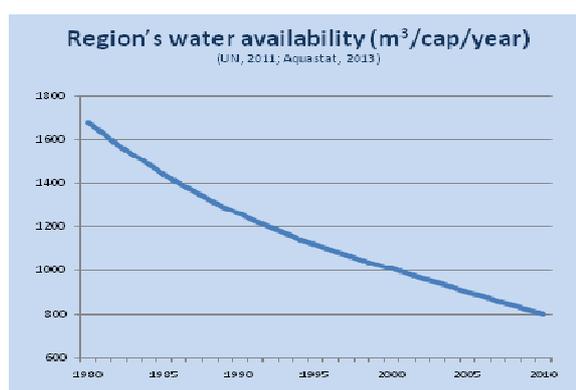
**Action areas:** It is important for the Arab governments to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas and improve the rate of access to water and sanitation services in all regions. Financing mechanisms to ensure affordable and adequate housing to poor households are needed to avoid the expansion of informal settlements. Solid waste management needs to be turned into a source of revenue and job creation in the region and provides many opportunities for the implementation of green economy solutions. Decentralization reforms are needed to empower local governments and increase accountability. There is a need in the region for promoting sustainable transport solutions and providing a decent and inclusive public transportation network, in addition to the importance of managing natural disaster risks and preserving cultural and natural heritage. All members of society should be catered for, including refugees and persons with disabilities, to achieve dignity for all.

## I. Water scarcity

The United Nations General Assembly formally recognized in 2010 the right of people to water and sanitation.<sup>62</sup> The principles of integrated water resources management acknowledge the tight relationship between access to water and sanitation and equitable socio-economic development.

The Arab region is quite unique in the combination of inter-linked challenges it faces in terms of water. The region has the lowest share of freshwater availability in the world and the largest proportion of its freshwater resources is trans-boundary. Furthermore, it is now fairly well documented that climate change will have negative effects on freshwater availability in the coming years, including through more frequent extreme events and seawater intrusion. There is evidently a growing competition on the demand for water between increasing populations, developing industries and expanding agricultural activities, and water scarcity will constitute a future development constraint and a threat to food and water security in the Arab region, especially that resources are unequally distributed and related governance and institutions are weak. Agriculture inefficiently consumes more than 85% of the region's water resources, and further losses are reported in water distribution networks. The agricultural sector is not only a major consumer of water, as it is also a major contributor to water pollution in the region due to uncontrolled use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The level of wastewater treatment remains low and untreated wastewater disposal is increasing. Gulf countries depend on desalinated water at considerable economic and environmental costs.

Lack of access to water and lack of improved sanitation, notably in rural areas, are other aspects of failure of public provisioning of social services. Providing access to water, as the MDGs aim for, is insufficient without looking at the quality of water and the cycle of water management. It is estimated that around 17% of the total population in the Arab region do not have access to improved drinking water sources (worse than the world average of 11%), and 20% do not have access to improved sanitation facilities. The majority of the populations lacking access reside in rural areas, and in LDCs in both rural and urban areas.<sup>63</sup>



<sup>62</sup> GA resolution 64/292, The Human right to water and sanitation (<http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/64/292&lang=E>).

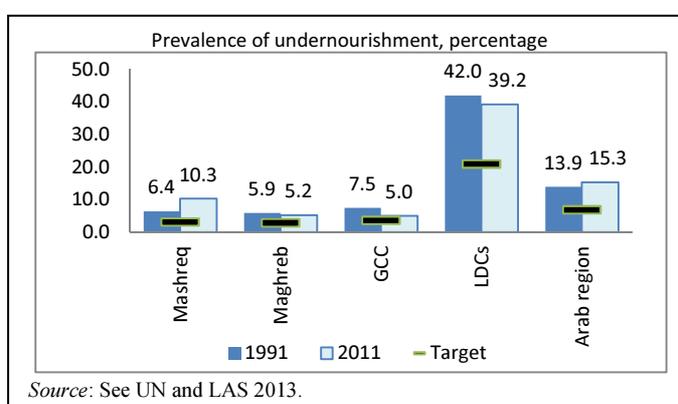
<sup>63</sup> UN-ESCWA, 2013.

The above-mentioned regional specificities in relation to water resources are not captured adequately in the MDG framework. As such, efforts have been exerted by ESCWA and partners to improve the monitoring and reporting on water supply and sanitation indicators (MDG+ initiative).<sup>64</sup>

**Action areas:** Issues of water use efficiency and governance, adequate and equal access and water quality are top regional priorities that have important impact on human well-being, the environment and overall economic development efforts. The effect of climate change on water security needs to be well understood and appropriate adaptation measures should be adopted. Access to appropriate water technologies, including water-saving and water treatment technologies, is an important enabler of water management and should be promoted. The integrated management of water resources is of the utmost importance, including for shared water resources. Actions are needed at all levels, from central governments to local authorities to the individual to ensure water is conserved and used efficiently and watersheds are protected and restored.

## J. Food insecurity

Poverty goes beyond just the income dimension. The non-income manifestations of poverty include hunger and undernourishment, which are increasingly prevalent in the region. The number of people living on less than the minimum level of dietary energy consumption rose from 13.9 per cent in 1991 to 15.3 per cent in 2011. On an aggregate level this represents some 50 million people who are currently undernourished in the region (increasing from 30 million in 1991).



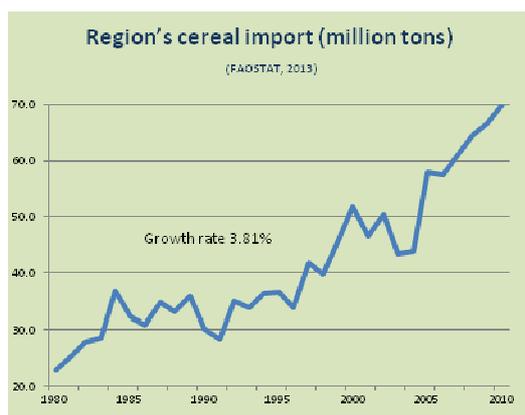
The LDCs include the majority of the undernourished people, however, it is also increasing in Mashreq. The percentage of children underweight increased from around 14.5 per cent in 1990s to around 15.3 per cent in 2010, mainly due to steep increase in LDCs although other sub-regions have done fairly well. In the LDCs, 35 per cent of children (more than one in three children) were underweight in 2010 as compared to 31 per cent in 1990. In the region, a quarter of children under age 5 were stunted in 2010.<sup>65</sup> The LDCs and Mashreq sub-regions show increasing child stunting between 1990 and 2010. These outcomes indicate multiple deprivations faced by children as well as mothers in the areas of access to food, clean water and sanitation as well as maternal education. Food insecurity in the region is tightly linked to pressures on environment and water shortages, in addition to policies that neglected rural development.

On the production side, improving food production in the Arab region faces both environmental and socio-economic constraints. On the environmental front, water scarcity, land degradation and desertification represent daunting challenges for Arab food producing countries. Agricultural policies, practices and support to farmers remain inadequate for the challenge, and inefficient irrigation technologies and expansion of agriculture into marginal lands are still pursued. It is estimated that three quarters of the agricultural exploitable land area have been affected by land degradation<sup>66</sup> including soil erosion and salinity, a phenomenon that will be exacerbated by climate change. Land degradation will impact natural grazing fields and reduce their carrying capacity.

<sup>64</sup> UN-ESCWA, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> See UN and LAS 2013.

<sup>66</sup> UN-ESCWA, 2007, Land Degradation Assessment and Prevention: Selected Case Studies from the ESCWA Region (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2007/4)



Social constraints to agricultural production include neglect of rural areas and poor investments in rural infrastructure and farmer support services. Poverty rates in the region are markedly higher in rural areas and rural non-farm economy remains highly constrained, which impacts negatively on agricultural production through a vicious circle.

According to the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD),<sup>67</sup> agricultural productivity in the region is below international levels for most crops. The level of food waste is estimated at around 1.3 billion tons yearly. As such, 13% of cereal production is lost at

the post-harvest stage and 10-20% at the storage stage. The total food loss is valued at one trillion dollars.

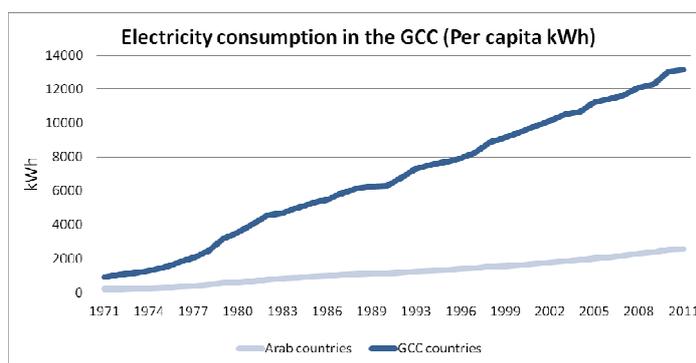
Arab countries import at least 50% of the food they consume and the region constitutes the largest importer of cereal, therefore impacting its sovereignty and exposing it to shocks resulting from fluctuations in agricultural commodity prices, such as the crisis exhibited in 2008. It is also unfortunate that the Arab region imports most of its needs in terms of seeds from abroad.

**Action areas:** It is of the utmost importance to end food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms through adequate policies, programmes and legal frameworks. There is a need to improve agricultural policies in the Arab region, and promote the productivity of small farmers and develop their livelihoods. Attempting to address food insecurity through business as usual approaches would greatly undermine the water and environmental resources. Studies show that there is yet potential for increasing agricultural productivity in selected Arab countries at no (or little) environmental cost, and many available technologies need to be exploited. Furthermore, there is an important potential for reducing food import bill by reducing crop wastes from farm to consumer. Adopting a food-energy-water nexus approach to food security is expected to increase the sustainability of production systems.

## K. Energy security

Energy is a key enabler of economic and social development and job creation. It links growth to social justice and environment.<sup>68</sup>

The Arab region presents wide divergence between oil and gas producing and non-producing countries. High and inefficient energy consumption patterns prevail in the Gulf countries, and electricity consumption more than doubled during the period between 1999 and 2011.<sup>69</sup> GCC countries



Source: IEA 2013, Energy Balance of Non-OECD Countries

should not remain complacent about their long-term supply advantage and alternatively seek to turn their oil resources into value-added products. This is especially true for natural gas, being more

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.aoad.org/eng/news-28-11-2013-1.htm>

<sup>68</sup> UNSG's Sustainable Energy for All Initiative, <http://www.se4all.org/our-vision>

<sup>69</sup> IEA 2013, Energy Balance of Non-OECD Countries

costly to export. On the other hand, non-producing countries are strained under a heavy energy bill and costly energy subsidy schemes. At the same time, more than 20% of the population in the Arab region remains without access to modern energy services, and intermittent supply of electricity is frequent in some areas.<sup>70</sup>

Energy security in the Arab region is highly interlinked with water security for a number of reasons. One important factor that is of relevance to the GCC countries in particular is the cost of desalination. For example, water desalination using multi-stage flash technology typically consumes around 5kWh in total energy use to desalinate one cubic meter of water. Electricity consumption for desalination purposes is expected to triple in the next two decades.<sup>71</sup> For oil producing countries, increasing local consumption of oil to meet increasing water demand will translate into less oil and gas revenues with potential impact on economic growth. This constitutes an additional reason for the region to invest in renewable energy technologies.

**Action areas:** Securing access to sustainable energy for all in the Arab region is greatly needed. It is important for all Arab countries, including the GCC, to invest more in energy efficiency and renewable energy applications (specifically solar and wind), both from a socio-economic perspective, but also in response to global concerns about climate change. Research efforts to develop or adapt locally appropriate energy technologies cannot be under-estimated. The choice of the appropriate renewable energy technology is critical, and will depend on national circumstances. Increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix should not come at the expense of water depletion, food security and deforestation, and as such, biofuels are not an option for the region.

## V. Proposed Sustainable Development Goals and Targets

Appreciating the results of the previous sections from a broad human development perspective calls for a rethinking of the region's approaches to development objectives. This rethinking needs to take into consideration both development priorities and development constraints. Development constraints play a fundamental role in affecting the outcome of the development process. They can be viewed as the "necessary conditions" that enable policy makers to address the development priorities. Naturally, some development constraints are more binding than others, depending on the country context.<sup>72</sup>

Another key issue to consider is the interdependence of the goals. To accelerate hunger reduction and to foster food security, economic growth must be accompanied by purposeful and decisive public action. It would be less effective to address the food security challenges without taking into account elements related to water, land, energy, governance, equity, and fiscal space among others. This is in line with the regional discussions on the nexus development approaches, such as the recently advocated water-energy-food nexus as an improved framework for development planning and implementation. Similarly, poverty and the lack of primary education are key factors that impact infant and maternal health, survival of women beyond childbirth has a direct impact on child mortality, girls and women are more likely to delay pregnancy and to have access to maternal health care when they have secondary education, higher level education is likely to lead to reduced poverty and so forth. Upholding this perspective and translating it into development policy at the national and regional level plays a crucial role in determining development outcomes. It is also the main tenet for advocating development goals as a 'package', rather than as isolated objectives.

Looking beyond the MDGs framework, a new approach is needed to setting the goals, targets and indicators to redefine progress in alignment with development as inclusive, equitable and

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<sup>70</sup> Hentati 2014, Background paper prepared for this document.

<sup>71</sup> Water Desalination Using Renewable Energy (IEA-ETSAP and IRENA Technology Brief I12 – March 2012).

<sup>72</sup> See Abu-Ismael et al for a more elaborate discussion.

sustainable.<sup>73</sup> Extending this line of analysis, the pertinent question is: which set of goals and targets are likely to have the strongest feedback effects so that the overall impact on development achievements would be maximized? Taking into account previous development stylized facts and the above noted interdependence of development goals as an underling logic, we propose the following ten development goals to reflect the region's future development aspirations:

1. **End extreme poverty**
2. **Create decent jobs**
3. **Provide quality education and lifelong learning for all**
4. **Empower girls and women, achieve gender equality and the full realization of women's human rights**
5. **Ensure healthy lives**
6. **Secure access to water and sanitation for all and promote the sustainable use and management of natural resources**
7. **Secure access to sustainable energy for all**
8. **End food insecurity and malnutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**
9. **Promote sustainable and inclusive cities and human settlements and ensure quality housing**
10. **Secure peaceful societies and effective institutions**
11. **Advance global partnerships for sustainable development**

For each goal listed above, a number of targets are proposed (see Annex 1) from an Arab regional perspective. As mentioned in section II of this document, the targets listed are in no way comprehensive; rather they focus on **key issues with the aim of drawing attention to the priorities of the region**. Like the MDGs, the purpose of the goals and targets is to serve as a rallying point for different actors, and galvanize actions and political will towards these global priorities. Hence, the need to harmonize reporting and monitoring of progress. Strengthening statistical systems of Arab countries in order to collect and analyze data at disaggregated levels as well as developing mechanisms to improve access to data and statistics are necessary for successful monitoring and reporting. Furthermore, and due to the disparities between the countries of the region, it is advised that the region supports global goals that are linked to a suite of targets that can be nationally selected and adapted to ensure relevance and national ownership.

## VI. Conclusion

It is indeed a memorable moment for development: A new global development agenda is in the making that will combine economic, social and environmental perspectives all in one. The Arab region has a golden opportunity to influence the global process, notably through the representation of six Arab countries on the membership of the OWG. There is an obligation to make this new agenda supportive of Arab regional priorities.

In this spirit, the present document has proposed a set of eleven SDGs from the perspective of the Arab region. The selection of the goals and targets has been justified by a succinct analysis of: a) the Arab regional context; b) the key regional challenges and priorities emanating from the findings of major ESCWA and other regional documents; and c) the action areas needed to achieve the desired transformational changes. Whenever applicable, progress made on the related MDGs has been provided, and shortcomings in the MDGs as a monitoring framework have been identified. This revised version of the document benefited from the comments submitted by participants in the Arab

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<sup>73</sup> Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko 2012, Should global goal setting continue, and how, in the post-2015 era? UN-DESA working paper no. 117.

High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development, which was organized by ESCWA and partners in Amman during 2-4 April 2014.

As indicated in the introductory part of this document, the intention is to make a regional contribution to the global process seeking to formulate a set of universal SDGs as part of a post-2015 development agenda. Efforts were exerted to identify a few development imperatives for the region, and no attempt was made to address all the elements of sustainable development. As such, it is hoped that this proposal will be practical and helpful to Arab negotiators as they embark on the SDGs negotiation phase, which is expected to last until the adoption of the post 2015 agenda by the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the GA in September 2015.

In terms of next steps, it is envisaged that the document shall be further discussed and validated during the upcoming conference on “Sustainable Development Priorities in the Arab Region for Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals” (Amman, 10-11 May 2014) and the 2014 session of the Arab Social Affairs Council. Following adoption by the Social Council, the proposal will be submitted to the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in January 2015 in Tunisia. On a parallel track, the document shall be submitted for the endorsement of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in view of the tight inter-linkages it presents with the Arab Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development which is currently under preparation with the support of ESCWA.

## Annex 1. Sustainable Development Goals and Targets ... An Arab Regional Perspective

Goal	Targets by 2030 (Economic, social, environmental, and institutional)
1. End extreme poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eradicate poverty at less than 1.25 USD per day</li> <li>• Reduce by xx the percentage of people living under 2\$ per day in LDCs, by xx the percentage of people living under 2.75\$ per day in the lower MICs, and by xx the percentage of people living under 4\$ per day in high MICs<sup>74</sup></li> <li>• Reduce high inequality within as well as across countries and rural-urban disparities</li> <li>• Increase social protection system coverage of people who are poor and vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, and including protection against natural and human-induced shocks</li> </ul>
2. Create decent jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate 100 million jobs for Arab citizens, including in public and private sectors (cumulative by 2030)<sup>75</sup></li> <li>• Reduce the gap between male and female employment in the labour market (reduce the ratio of male to female employment to xx)</li> <li>• Reduce women and youth unemployment</li> <li>• Set wages in accordance to the national poverty lines that provide access to basic goods and service</li> <li>• Mobilize resources for productive investment, industrial diversification, especially in the labour intensive sectors, for increased job creation</li> </ul>
3. Provide quality education and lifelong learning for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve primary and secondary completion rates</li> <li>• Improve minimum performance of students to be at least in par with international benchmarks (TIMSS)</li> <li>• Increase skills enhancement knowledge and vocational programs for all, including youth, elderly and persons with disabilities</li> <li>• Reduce inequality in education opportunities between regions</li> <li>• Increase access to higher education such as ICT, entrepreneurship and research and development in technology</li> </ul>
4. Empower girls and women, achieve gender equality and the full realization of women's human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls</li> <li>• End child marriage</li> <li>• End discrimination against women in political, economic, and public life</li> </ul>

<sup>74</sup> See Abu-Ismaïl et al. 2014.

<sup>75</sup> UNDP 2011. Scenario if to achieve full employment as well as higher female labour participation rate.

<p>5. Ensure healthy lives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce infant and child mortality by xx in the least developed countries of the region.<sup>76</sup></li> <li>• Reduce maternal mortality by xx in the least developed countries of the region.</li> <li>• Reduce obesity among the general population, including children and youth</li> <li>• Ensure all children under 5 years of age are vaccinated for infectious diseases</li> <li>• Reduce the burden of major diseases, both communicable and chronic diseases</li> <li>• Increase access to quality health care services, including special health care services for reproductive health, especially for the poor</li> <li>• Ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030</li> </ul>
<p>6. Secure access to water and sanitation for all and promote the sustainable use and management of natural resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure access to safe potable water, sanitation and hygiene</li> <li>• Promote the integrated management of water resources, including shared water</li> <li>• Reduce amounts of pollutants seeping into water bodies</li> <li>• Improve by (xx) the sustainable use and development of water resources</li> <li>• Increase domestic and industrial waste water treatment and the use of non-conventional water</li> <li>• Adopt effective policies, strategies and practices for sustainable use and management of natural resources</li> <li>• Reduce rate of water losses</li> <li>• Improve water efficiency indicators in all activities and uses</li> <li>• Increase public expenditure on modern water and sanitation infrastructure</li> <li>• Develop and implement climate change adaptation policies</li> <li>• Promote access to appropriate water technologies</li> </ul>
<p>7. Secure access to sustainable energy for all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the share of solar and wind energy in the energy mix</li> <li>• Reduce rate of energy losses</li> <li>• Improve energy efficiency indicators in all activities and uses</li> <li>• Increase public expenditure on modern energy infrastructure</li> <li>• Develop and implement climate change mitigation policies</li> <li>• Promote access to appropriate energy technologies</li> <li>• Increase investments in research and innovation for renewable energy technologies</li> </ul>

<sup>76</sup> Between 2015 and 2030, reduce infant mortality rate for the region by 40 per cent, maternal mortality rate by 24 per cent. The reduction rate for the LDCs is much more than the average for the region. For country specific targets and detail methodology on setting targets, see Khalid Abu-Ismael, Aljaz Kuncic, Naren Prasad and Niranjana Sarangi, 2014, An Arab Perspective on the Post 2015 Agenda: National targets, regional priorities and global goals.

<p>8. End food insecurity and malnutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All people have access to adequate (safe, affordable, diverse and nutritious) food all year round</li> <li>• End malnutrition in all its forms (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overnutrition), with special attention to ending stunting</li> <li>• All food and agriculture production systems become more productive, sustainable, resilient and efficient – minimizing adverse environmental impact without compromising food and nutrition security</li> <li>• All small food and agriculture producers, especially women, have secure access to adequate inputs, knowledge, productive resources and services to increase their productivity sustainably and improve their income and resilience</li> <li>• Decrease area of degraded lands and combat desertification</li> <li>• Improve the efficiency of post-production food systems (harvest, handling and storage, processing and packaging, transport and consumption) and decrease crop waste from farm to consumer by 50%</li> <li>• Increase public expenditure on Sustainable Agriculture Programs</li> <li>• Adopt water and energy saving technologies in agriculture and food industry</li> <li>• Decrease land areas cultivated using non-sustainable practices</li> <li>• Maintain and develop fish stocks</li> <li>• Maintain the productivity of forests</li> </ul>
<p>9. Promote sustainable and inclusive cities and human settlements and ensure quality housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the right to adequate housing and improve the conditions of poor neighborhoods</li> <li>• Promote sustainable transport and ensure the right to a decent, safe, inclusive and affordable public transportation network</li> <li>• Reduce premature deaths due to air pollution</li> <li>• Ensure access of people and industrial activities to quality infrastructure services</li> <li>• Increase the proportion of recycled waste</li> <li>• Decrease the inequality in access to services between cities and marginalized regions</li> <li>• Strengthen local governments</li> <li>• Ensure inclusive cities and accessibility for persons with disabilities in cities and human settlements</li> <li>• Develop capabilities to manage the risks of natural and human-induced disasters</li> <li>• Protect cultural and natural heritage</li> </ul>

<p>10. Secure peaceful societies and effective institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove the obstacles to the full realization of the right of self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation</li> <li>• Ensure human rights of refugees</li> <li>• Ensure rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly and access to information</li> <li>• Ensure the rule of law and independence of the judiciary</li> <li>• Ensure equal access to justice</li> <li>• Improve transparency and accountability in public finances management</li> <li>• Leverage ICT and promote e-government services</li> </ul>
<p>11. Advance global partnerships for sustainable development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase net ODA, total and to the LDCs, as percentage of OECD/DAC donors' gross national income</li> <li>• Increase proportion of total ODA of OECD/DAC donors and regional donors to country development needs, especially of the LDCs</li> <li>• Increase proportion of total developed country imports (by value and excluding arms) from developing countries and least developed countries, admitted free of duty</li> <li>• Remove trade barriers imposed by developed countries on agricultural products, textiles and clothing from developing countries</li> <li>• Ensure access to essential life-saving drugs for all</li> <li>• Improve national institutional capacities, ownership and accountability with regard to utilization of development assistance</li> <li>• Ensure greater cooperation on environmentally sound technology transfer and support action on both climate change mitigation and adaptation and natural disaster risk management</li> </ul>

## Annex 2. List of background papers

### Papers in Arabic

- أديب نعمة، ٢٠١٤، أفكار بصدد أجندة ما بعد ٢٠١٥
- محمد عادل الهنتاتي، ٢٠١٤، قضايا التنمية ذات الأولوية بالمنطقة العربية: مقترح أهداف محددة للتنمية المستدامة للمنطقة العربية

### Papers in English

- Khalid Abu-Ismaïl, Aljaz Kuncic, Naren Prasad and Niranjana Sarangi, 2014, An Arab Perspective on the Post 2015 Agenda: National targets, regional priorities and global goals
- Lana Baydas, 2014, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Regional Perspective
- Cameron Allen, Reem Nejdawi and Jana El-Baba, 2013, SDG Priority Conceptual Issues: Towards an Arab Approach for the Sustainable Development Goals (Discussion paper submitted to the Arab Regional Consultative Dialogue on the Sustainable Development Goals, Tunisia, 18-19 November 2013)

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