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Arab NGO Network for Development
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية

Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) reaction to HLP Report

The High Level Panel Report (HLP) on the post-2015 development agenda entitled “*A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development*” was made public on May 30th, 2013. The 81-page document marks a difference in the approach adopted by diverting from the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) setting and reflecting a more inclusive process through consultations undertaken and inputs received from different stakeholders.

The Arab region in particular stands at a crossroads, and in this context, the post-2015 process is central to it. The Arab Region is undergoing a dramatic political transition, yet including escalating civil tensions often of sectarian nature, while still suffering from the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine. All these factors carry tremendous and devastating impact on peace, stability and development in the region. Moreover, the recent peoples’ uprisings in the region clearly demonstrated the lack of freedom and democracy, their ability to participate in the public policy making and to hold the decision makers accountable and responsible. They uprisings indicate the gap between economic growth and development as the people called for a citizen-centered development paradigm. This is aside from national policies implemented and the obligations deriving from relations with international actors (i.e. EU, US, WTO etc.) are applicable to the overall MDG framework adopted.

Within this context, the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) has been following the post-2015 process closely. It participated in different consultations and meetings and co-organized with the UN ESCWA a regional consultations meeting for CSOs from the Arab region on the envisaged post-2015 development agenda. The consultations concluded with recommendations that were raised to the HLP before its meeting in Indonesia in March 2013. ANND’s position reflected the genuine needs and necessities of the Arab region and was developed with a human rights-based approach.

Building on that, ANND sees that positive aspects of the report including “universality”, “a stand-alone goal for women”, “environment-development nexus” and recognition of peace as a cornerstone of sustainable development” among others are welcome. Moreover, the highlight of the report on the need of “the new goals and targets to be grounded in respect for universal human rights” is a clear “shift” towards the rights based approach that we highly appreciate. Yet the shift remains limited given that **the report’s tone on economic and social rights is “secondary”, defining them as “basic needs”**. **The post-2015 framework must rather underline the**

indivisibility, universality and interdependency and interrelatedness of human rights.

Last but not least, as we welcome the High Level Panel Report on the post-2015 development agenda, we join several other rights-based organizations in their **call to the UN Secretary General and UN member states to go beyond the HLP report and to ensure that post-2015 process does not fail to address the structural causes hindering sustainable development that brings in “the new development framework.”**

The below listed points are developed in the aftermath of our reading over the HLP Report.

On Goal 1: End Poverty:

Poverty alleviation has always been, and will always be the benchmark upon which developmental goals are designed, and in this report, poverty eradication is set as the first goal of the post-2015 development agenda. As for Goal 1, we actually perceive it as advancement, especially that poverty is now not only confined by quantitative indicators, rather it includes right to property, social assistance, resilience etc. alongside poverty lines (extreme and national). However, we see that holding on to \$1.25 a day poverty line is not anymore a poverty line, rather a ‘hunger’ line considering the rising inflation rates over the past MDGs era. Furthermore, according to the report, one of the indicators of ending poverty is the percentage coverage of poor and vulnerable people with social security systems. Yet the report has failed to recognize that social protection is an internationally acknowledged human right and entrenched in the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹, particularly in articles 9 and 10. In this respect, **we demand that a universal standard of social protection coverage be defined and included in goal number 1.** Otherwise, we see it as deterioration and retreat from social protection obligations set by the covenant.

On Goal 8: Create Jobs, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Equitable Growth

The role of the private sector and international financial institutions (IFIs) are appraised although privatization without regulatory framework and interventions of IFIs irrespective of the national development levels and national priorities merely bring negative impacts including unemployment, wage decrease and more poverty- the later being the central item for the HLP Report. This clearly indicates that whereas the Panel asked right questions and defined right challenges they remained timid in proposing solutions in correspondence.

The report argues that “many countries are using public social protection programmes and social and environmental regulations to bring down high levels of domestic inequality by improving the lives of the worst-off, while also

¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

transforming their economies so that growth is sustained over the long term and provides more good jobs and secure livelihoods". It concludes stating, "it is now possible to leave no one behind." However, the report simply underestimates the remaining majority of countries. In the Arab region for instance, there is no any self-regulation mechanism as described. Furthermore there is no such self-accountability level from government to their citizens. Indeed the practices at the Arab region reflect that its people are not only left behind but also "ignored". **In relation, a relevant proposition² towards the role that existing international human rights instruments, such as UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, core human rights treaties including International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and human rights monitoring mechanisms including Universal Periodic Review can play with regard to ensuring accountability is underestimated. Additionally we insist that mere economic growth is not a panacea.**

On Goal 11: Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies

The report's emphasis on peace is particularly important, given that Arab region where **serious and committed efforts for conflict resolution is needed primarily for the Arab-Israeli conflict**. Accordingly the report states that "to achieve peace, leaders must tackle the problems that matter most to people: they must prosecute corruption and unlawful violence, especially against minorities and vulnerable groups. They must enhance accountability. They must prove that the state can deliver basic services and rights, such as access to safety and justice, safe drinking water and health services, without discrimination". Yet **our realities in the Arab region call that to achieve peace: occupation, separation and Israeli colonial expansionism must immediately halt. In this regard, the Report is unsatisfactory with its exclusion of a clear goal with regard to the "right to self determination" as outlined in the Millennium Declaration.**

With regard to accountability, we note the new data revolution proposed and agree that right to access information is central to ensure accountability. Accessibility and availability of data at disaggregated level is key to track progress and to keep governments accountable, yet equally important is implementation of **legislative provisions that encourage independent sources of information such as the press, media and civil society organizations. Moreover, the accountability approach reflected in the Report at only right level, making different constituencies accountable to each other does not necessarily bring in mutual accountability that the Report also stress.**

On Goal 12: Create a Global Enabling Environment and Catalyze Long Term Finance

The last goal of the report aims at establishing the platform for a more prosperous, equitable and just post-2015 era. Some steps for implementation

² UPR is only referred in ANNEX IV chart-as key issues raised in Panel's outreach efforts.

addressed within this goal are welcome, as we perceive them to be a step forward towards a brighter future for economies of developing and least-developed countries. For instance, we applaud the report's conceding that there's a need to apply reforms to the international financial architecture, especially following the outbreak of the global financial crisis late last decade. Furthermore, we find essential the exchange of information between developed and developing countries to combat tax avoidance and track down illicit transfer pricing by multinational corporations that shift their profits to off-shores and tax havens.

However, we raise our concerns over two specific issues, particularly over "supporting an open, fair and development friendly trading system, substantially reducing trade-distorting measures, including agricultural subsidies, while improving market access of developing country products" and "encouraging stable, long-term private foreign investment".

Regarding the former, it is noted that the Arab region has already been engaged in the mainstream business recipe that calls for opening markets, liberalizing trade (in agriculture, services, manufacturing etc.) and finance. This recipe has always been promoted by international partners as one which brings along more equitable growth and opportunity for all. Yet, besides the satisfactory growth rates of GDP in some Arab countries the national development project was completely neglected. Consequently unemployment, poverty and inequality have risen further. The report alleges that the WTO is the most effective tool to increase the developmental impact of trade. However, the report has disregarded the potential repercussions that may result from complete liberalization of domestic markets via removing the various types of trade barriers. Given the poor economic situation in the region, the domination of the services sector on manufacturing and agriculture, as well as the volatile prices of basic commodities, we find **trade liberalization obligations imposed upon Arab governments by bilateral or multilateral agreements, namely "substantial reduction of trade-distorting measures" such as subsidies on agriculture and oil, or removal of tariffs aimed at protecting indigenous sectors with value added production, harsh on economies of these countries as well as threatens the realization of economic and social rights by citizens and local communities.** Within this context, we find the goal to be shortsighted without any provision on periodic assessments of the implications of existing trade practices on the economic and social fronts. Therefore, we demand that developing countries in general, and Arab countries in particular, have their country-specificities respected on one hand, and on the other be allowed to follow suit of developed countries in their quest to development. In other words, **we demand that they be allowed the policy-space that enables them to create policies aimed at reviving their economies in terms of inclusive and job-generating growth and development as well as minimizing the potential negative spillovers that may result from further liberalization.**

As for the latter, the report adopts an indicator on reforms to encourage stable, long-term private foreign investment: From the experience of Arab

countries, the models of growth that prioritized integration in the global economy through trade and investment liberalization, helped in boosting economic growth, yet poverty, unemployment and inequities were on the rise, and potential positive spillovers to indigenous economies were timid. Markets were not working the way they should, and the relevant political system was not correcting these failures. The incumbent economic paradigm shaping investor relation with governments is unequivocally biased for the benefit of multinational corporations. Within this context, **we demand that legal instruments providing foreign investors with substantive legal protection be rethought and amended upon a human rights-based perspective rather than from an “investor protection” mentality.**

On a different note, despite notable economic growth in the previous decade, the Arab region faces increasing and enduring inequalities. Indeed, peoples' uprisings since 2011 in several countries of the region clearly demonstrated that economic growth does not by necessity lead to development. Income inequality (the most prominent form of inequality) across the planet has been, and still is, rising sharply as the top 0.5 % of the world's population holds over 35% of the world's GDP, or the richest 20% are benefiting from 70% of world income while the poorest 20% benefit from less than 1% of world income. Hence, a more comprehensive approach to growth is needed; one that is inclusive and re-distributional and ensures that the elements of this growth benefit all of society through the **adoption and implementation of policies for equity, respect of the law, redistribution of wealth and wealth creation.** The HLP report acknowledges that inequality is a crosscutting issue, however it emphasizes equality of opportunity rather than “redistribution” which we consider to be an essential element in diminishing income gaps. In this regard, we feel obliged to bring about the issue of inequality and express our resentment from the report's dismissal of “redistribution” as an essential tool for fighting inequality. Furthermore, **we stress on the importance of broadening the report's approach to include inequality as an integrated goal for the post-2015 agenda as well as addressing the causes of the growing income gap on the national and global levels.**

Possible indicators to track progress in inequality reduction could be related to a nation's Gini Index or Palma Ratio. The UN is invited to consult with experts over the establishment of such indicators that would essentially cover a wider dimension of inequality, be it social, economic (income) or cultural.

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) is a regional network, working in 12 Arab countries with seven national networks, and an extended membership of 200 civil society organisations. ANND aims at strengthening the role of civil society, enhancing the values of democracy, respect of human rights and sustainable development in the region. ANND advocates for more sound and effective socio-economic reforms in the region, which integrate the concepts of sustainable development, gender justice, and the rights-based approach. ANND follows the post-2015 process actively with its members from the region and organized regional and national consultations that brought in significant recommendations by the civil society groups on the structure, process, priorities and thematic issues of the framework. For more information on ANND: www.annd.org