The Arab Development Forum, held on 10 and 11 April, 2013, in Amman, Jordan, was a consultation convened by the Regional United Nations Development Group to gather the views of civil society from across the Arab region on a new development agenda to build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Forum was held under the patronage of Queen Rania al Abdullah of Jordan, who as a Member of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has taken a leading role in advocating for an inspiring and ambitious future development framework.

Over 200 participants from 18 Arab countries took part in the consultation. Their input was frank, grounded, and inspirational. And their message was clear: The Arab region is changing quickly and the time is ripe for a truly transformational development agenda.

The Post-2015 Agenda which civil society called for in this Forum would build on the strengths of the MDGs while also making refinements and additions that help trace an even more relevant outline for the Arab region’s path towards sustainable human development.

In areas such as poverty, health, and education which were covered by the MDGs, there is a need to revisit targets and indicators to ensure that they can be relevant for all regions and countries, and within countries; that they capture not only quantitative information but qualitative, too; and that they monitor not only aggregate data but also disaggregated data which can bring inequalities of all kinds into view.

Participants also called for areas which were at the heart of the Millennium Declaration to be better reflected in the next global development framework. This includes governance issues such as voice and participation; issues related to peace, security, and national self-determination; and a fuller embrace of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

In this sense participants are clear that there should no longer be a gap between long-standing normative and legal frameworks, and the development goals that governments set. Indeed, the latter should serve as part of a road map for the achievement of the former.

Participants also presented the view that all development is interconnected. In particular the next development framework must reflect the inter-dependencies of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. This is of critical importance as the Post-2015 and Sustainable Development Goals processes begin to come together as one.

Looking ahead to implementation, participants were clear in the view that civil society is ready, willing and able to contribute more to the definition of policy and the achievement of
progress than they have been enabled to in the past in the Arab world. Development cannot be achieved by government alone. Sustainable human development requires the joint efforts of all stakeholders – nationally, regionally, and globally.

Naturally these views will present the architects of the Post-2015 framework with a number of conceptual and methodological challenges. But ambitions must be high. The MDGs played a major role in galvanizing actors around a common and meaningful set of common goals. However the world is different today than it was when the MDGs were rolled out, and the time has come for a global development framework that helps us all move together towards the world we want.

I am pleased that the report is issued in time to inform the various processes underway around the world to generate ideas for the next development framework. In particular I hope it will be of use to United Nations Member States as they discuss the way forward at the MDG Review Summit during this year’s General Assembly, and as the Open Working Group accelerates in its important deliberations to shape the next development framework.

Ultimately the next development framework will be defined by Member States working together to find common ground. However the United Nations Development Group has an important role in ensuring the process is as consultative as possible and is informed by evidence on people’s priorities. I am thankful that the civil society participants in this Arab Development Forum answered our call with such passion and insight, building on the body of information we have gleaned from facilitating national consultations in 9 Arab countries, and from the over-10,000 people in the Arab region who have marked their views in the global MyWorld Survey. I hope that this Report from the Arab region contributes effectively to a process towards a new development framework which is truly inspiring — for every country, every region and the world as a whole.

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The Arab region is currently undergoing the most profound wave of change of its modern history. Women, men, and youth around the region have voiced demands for political and economic inclusion, increased opportunities and social mobility, and a relationship between state and society forged on human rights, social justice, equality, voice and participation, and accountability. Some countries are undertaking the beginnings of transition; others are experimenting with new kinds of reform.

These changes are coinciding in some cases with significant frictions. Several countries are experiencing difficulties in arriving at consensus on the way forward. Socio-economic needs are mounting in many countries. In some cases new pressures on social cohesion or political consensus have surfaced, reflected in new types of conflict, violence or unrest.

As the Arab region navigates this complex period its prospects are shaped also by deep drivers and underlying factors such as demographic, technological, and social change; institutional challenges rooted in decades of relatively insular political, economic and social systems; long-standing development deficits revealed in stubborn poverty, high levels of unemployment, and broad inequities across the spectrum of the development experience; and an unsure international environment that continues to pose risks of many kinds.

As the world pursues a transformational development agenda to build on the Millennium Development Goals, voices in the Arab region are calling for a framework that helps bring these myriad challenges into focus, and provides the basis for participatory national development and principles-based regional and global cooperation to meet shared goals derived from a vision that is globally, regionally and nationally owned.

In this context the Regional UNDG brought together over 200 participants from 18 Arab Countries to discuss priorities and articulate their priorities and views for the emerging Post-2015 Development Agenda.

**Core Principles of a new development framework:**

While working groups were organized by specific development themes, a key overall message coming from the Forum is the interconnectedness of all dimensions of sustainable human development. Participants clearly articulated the importance of sustainable development as the integration of sustainable environment, economic and social development. Participants similarly voiced that any development framework must fully reflect and build upon the values enshrined in the UN Charter and international human rights covenants, and reflected in the Millennium Declaration itself. Five such values stood out as particularly important to voices in the Arab region:
**Equity:** Concern with inequalities of all kinds was voiced in each session. Inequalities are obstacles which prevent fair access to livelihoods, education, and resources as well as full participation in political and cultural life. They magnify the challenge of creating sustainable prosperity and diminish the space for individuals, households, and communities to seek the mix of economic, social, and ecological assets that best meets their needs. Inequalities are prevalent in education, health and labour markets, and stand as a new iteration of poverty challenges, a driver of conflict, and as a gap between men and women. They persist in the Arab world and are often deeply rooted in discrimination and injustice, for example in differential access to legal systems or social and economic resources. They can be politically entrenched and passed from one generation to the next. Inequalities affect not only marginalized people, but are pervasive and corrosive for society as a whole. Equity must be a pillar of the Post-2015 Agenda.

**Resilience:** The Arab region has witnessed numerous shocks and stresses brought upon by conflicts and upheaval, including those driven by internal political and social factors as well as those involving invasion and occupation by external actors; by economic shifts such as increasing vulnerability to food-price shocks; by environmental degradation, including the impacts of climate change; and by underlying resource scarcity, particularly with respect to water and arable land. The potential for new conflicts persists as the region’s political architecture is reshaped, and population dynamics change. As global patterns shift and as new stressors emerge, this continuously fragile context impacts the region, its natural resources and, most of all, its people. There is a need for institutions to incorporate adaptive strategies with the culture and ethics of communities as starting points, bolstered by essential institutional and financial investments across multiple sectors. Incorporating the principles of resilience within the Post-2015 framework will help maintain focus in the region on addressing vulnerabilities and setting up systemic responses to help cope with change.

**Sustainability:** Environmental change affects all the MDGs and is one of the greatest threats facing communities across the Arab region as they seek to achieve and sustain development beyond 2015. The Arab region faces the world’s highest levels of water and food insecurity, and some of the most serious risks from climate change. A majority of the region’s poor households lacks access to sustainable energy. As highlighted at the Rio+20 Sustainable Development Conference and related dialogues in the Arab region, greater efforts are needed to integrate issues of resource security and environmental change into new development goals and policies taking shape globally and across the region. This is all the more urgent as the region’s population continues to grow, from the 2010 level of 357 million people to a projected 468 million by 2025.
Accountability: Driven by the momentous role of young people, the Arab region is engaged in a transformation towards increased public accountability and inclusion. This important dynamic permeated the discussions in every working group during the Arab Development Forum. Societies across the region demand that political, social and economic institutions at local, national, regional and international levels be accountable and inclusive. This goes beyond governments alone, as businesses and multilateral institutions, including the United Nations system, must also ensure a high standard of accountability and transparency. It is clear from the Forum that to be credible the global debate on Post-2015 must show more ambition in the direction of human rights, including through stronger mechanisms to hold duty-bearers to account.

Participation: Changes in the region call for a paradigm shift on the basis of a new social contract forged on shared responsibilities between government and citizen. The call for transparent processes and open channels to facilitate participation is driven by a very deep notion of shared responsibilities at all levels, a recurring theme throughout the Arab Development Forum.

Accelerating the MDGs
The Arab region has seen mixed progress against the MDGs, with the region’s Middle Income Countries (MICs) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) lagging furthest behind, and overall progress slowing since 2010 amidst the global economic downturn and regional instability. With less than 1000 days left to the MDGs target date, there is a need to revive and accelerate progress towards the existing targets, with specific attention to extreme poverty and hunger and the improvement of maternal health.

Looking ahead: Existing goals need refinement
Participants affirmed that basic issues such as income poverty, food security, education and health remain relevant and should feature strongly in a future development framework. However more relevant targets and indicators than those used in the MDGs are needed if future goals are to properly frame challenges and critical issues for the region.

> A future goal on poverty reduction, for example, should allow countries or regions flexibility in setting the targets. The current indicator of US$1.25-per-day leads to underestimates of poverty in the Arab region. While only 7.4% of people in the Arab region live under that amount, a full 20% live on less than US$2 per day, an amount that is equally insufficient for basic needs and dignity in the Arab region. Additionally, beyond monetary measurements, the defining parameters for the poverty line should incorporate considerations such as food security and adequate standards of living that preserve human dignity as factors.
Employment goals should feature more directly in the future framework. The Arab region has among the highest unemployment rates in the world. Young men and women in particular are an untapped resource and need proactive efforts to engage constructively in society.

Indicators should allow for monitoring of quality. Although many Arab countries have made progress on increasing access to basic services, participants voiced that rapid expansion has coincided with a deterioration of standards. A future goal framework should benefit from the experience of the MDGs and put more emphasis on the quality of social development rather than a sole focus on quantitative progress. This applies in particular to the quality of education, the quality of water, and the quality of health services, particularly for women.

National aggregates conceal social exclusion. There is a need to bring inequalities into view – at the regional, national and sub-national levels and across social typologies. The Arab region is more diverse in terms of national income than any other in the world. Countries such as Qatar lead in world income ranking-tables and countries such as Yemen or Djibouti are among the poorest in the world. In many Arab countries, poverty is highly-concentrated in rural areas. Gender-disaggregated targets can also bring to light inequalities and track disparities between women and men.

Issues of resource security and climate change should be in stronger focus in the Post-2015 framework. This is seen as critical for the Arab region in particular given its position as the most water-insecure region in the world.

Looking towards an expanded Agenda
In addition to these refinements to the current goals, delegates called for a future development framework to also reflect the importance of a broader agenda, including issues featured in the Millennium Declaration but not translated into the MDGs.

Voice, participation and good governance, including in the management of natural resources, are seen not only as human rights but also as enablers of sustainable human development that should be reflected in a future framework.

Social cohesion, freedom from violence, conflict resolution and mediation, and an end to occupation are pre-requisites for making progress on goals, alongside the need to foster citizenship and strengthen respect of diversity.
> **Partnership and financing for development need to be better captured in a future development framework**, with emphasis on global initiatives such as the UN Secretary-General’s global strategy on women and children’s health. Given changes in the global economic structure, South-South partnerships and public–private-civil society partnerships need to be much more vibrant than they have been during implementation of the MDG framework.

> **Gender equality and women’s empowerment** are goals on their own and are widely recognized preconditions to achieving all other development outcomes. The new development framework will need to feature a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment, while also mainstreaming the same into goals, targets and indicators in all sectors. It will also need to address the absence of targets in the MDGs on violence against women and legal rights.

> **Regional cooperation is seen as a key driver of development progress**, and the process towards the Post-2015 Agenda will be most useful if it is to catalyse increased regional social and economic cooperation across countries in the Arab region.

**The Role of Civil Society**

Civil society participants in the Arab Development Forum clearly articulated a demand to be consulted and engaged in meaningful partnership in shaping development commitments and in delivering results in a context of enhanced accountability.

The message coming out of this Forum was clear — the changes underway in the Arab region underscore the need for a renewed social contract supported by a call for equal dignity of all citizens and an equality of opportunity to participate in public affairs. Civil society across the Arab region, including youth and women, are often a driving force for positive change in their communities but face serious obstacles to their full engagement in public processes.

The vision of civil society is that the Post-2015 framework is to be seen as a call to action for the pluralistic engagement of all stakeholders in driving development. Civil society voiced that every right is balanced by a corresponding responsibility and held that a government’s authority is not a licence to rule, but a contract to serve. While governments play a vital role in providing leadership and serving as stewards in finalizing the new development agenda, civil society must identify how they will engage to make this vision a reality.

Forum deliberations showcased the kinds of roles and spaces that civil society fulfils in advancing development. Participants emphasised the opportunity to begin building institutions on a foundation of genuine democratic accountability, and the need to articulate a vision for the region and offer tangible policies and approaches that speak to peoples’ values.
They defined some of the key roles they play that should continue to be strengthened, in the shaping of policy priorities, as advocates for local context and needs, as implementing partners of development programmes, and as monitors of development progress. Priority was placed on the potential of harnessing social accountability for more equitable and sustainable management of natural resources and the environment through environmental rights and justice frameworks, and gender-responsive development policies.

Participants asked not only whether the Post-2015 Agenda can focus the region’s capabilities on meeting development goals, but also whether the future agenda can embed the ideals and reflect the priorities and visions of citizens. Ultimately, participants held that Arab states and the region as a whole are bound together because the interests of each individual are inextricably linked to the wellbeing of every other member of society, making sustained prosperity and social justice inseparable and mutually reinforcing. The success or failure of the MDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda will be determined by all stakeholders working together.

Session Notes: Proceedings from the Arab Development Forum
Over the course of the Arab Development Forum, six working group sessions were held, representing a cross-section of issues that are of vital importance to the region, and featured prominently in the Millennium Declaration. These sessions focused on current status and trends within each respective theme, and culminated with consideration of prospects for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
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