Working for a Just and Prosperous Arab World

ESCWA at 40

ESCWA

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

WORKING FOR A JUST AND PROSPEROUS ARAB WORLD

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United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Photo credit: ESCWA

Today, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) marks its fortieth anniversary, as the Arab region is undergoing social and political changes that are impacting global trajectories and development paradigms. ESCWA is proud of its contribution to development thinking and gains in the region, and reaffirms its commitment to support Arab Governments and citizens in securing a just and dignified future for all.

ESCWA works with the region, for the region. Its commitment is founded on a global development message that upholds the rights of all, regardless of ethnicity, affiliation or gender. The Commission works with Governments, civil society organizations and experts to build consensus and broker agreements. It ensures that development strategies and approaches reflect national political will, are based on facts and knowledge and are driven by a regional momentum that strengthens the position of Arab countries at international forums.

Over the past 40 years, and under the leadership of various executive secretaries, ESCWA has strengthened its partnership with the League of Arab States in all sectors. The Arab region is rich and diverse, offering ample opportunities for economic, social, cultural and environmental integration. Similarities between countries increase the benefits of such integration, and data and current research support the regional integration approach, even though global and regional frameworks might sometimes appear less than supportive.

ESCWA has been instrumental in brokering agreements between Arab countries on common strategies and initiatives in such vital areas as climate change, transport facilitation and the empowerment of young people and women. The road was rocky at times and challenges may have appeared insurmountable; nevertheless, our achievements justify our efforts and reaffirm our commitment to regional integration as a cornerstone of equitable development in the Arab region.

Looking forward, ESCWA constantly strives to collaborate with countries to ensure that its vision mirrors their core priorities and needs. The seven priority areas outlined in the present anniversary booklet summarize country requirements, reflected in a wide-ranging and comprehensive set of planned programmes, activities and publications, in addition to practical projects and initiatives addressing various social, economic, environmental and political development issues.

Moreover, ESCWA reiterates that a development vision for the Arab region cannot overlook the Palestinian right to self-determination and development. It closely monitors the impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinians and the region. Moreover, ESCWA has spared no effort in supporting development in Palestine, despite debilitating conditions. It will continue to provide the needed support for the Palestinian cause and to advocate Palestinian rights enshrined in international treaties.

Monitoring the current unrest in the region, ESCWA is increasingly aware of the importance of development policies in securing human rights, social justice and stability; and of the role of the international community in ensuring peace and stability. Such rights should be enjoyed by all individuals, regardless of their needs, affiliations or social backgrounds. These are some of the lessons that guide our work, as the world grapples with a new post-2015 development agenda and a set of ambitious sustainable development goals.

ESCWA is well aware that its aims will be achieved gradually and that some of the policies and frameworks presented herein for just, inclusive and sustainable development require a strong commitment from all individuals, institutions and countries. ESCWA is confident that this commitment will form the basis of future common approaches, uniting the region under specific priorities aimed at securing a better future for the Arab region and its people.

RIMA KHALAF
Executive Secretary

ESCWA AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHMENT & MANDATE

ESCWA was established in 1973 and is one of five United Nations Regional Commissions. It is part of the United Nations Secretariat and reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The mandate of ESCWA is to support economic and social development in member States and to strengthen cooperation among them. In 2012, its membership reached 17 States.

ESCWA MEMBER STATES & LOCATIONS

ESCWA DIVISIONS AND CENTRES

- SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES
- SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBALIZATION
- STATISTICS
- TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT
- CENTRE FOR WOMEN
- EMERGING AND CONFLICT-RELATED ISSUES
- THE ESCWA TECHNOLOGY CENTRE IN AMMAN

HOW ESCWA WORKS

RESEARCH

ESCWA conducts research and produces studies and policy advice on all aspects of socioeconomic development. Knowledge is developed and shared with and for policymakers, civil society, experts and practitioners.

HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS

ESCWA organizes high-level conferences, intergovernmental meetings and capacity-building workshops to tackle socioeconomic issues. ESCWA also provides a regional forum for senior officials of member States to coordinate their positions at regional and international conferences and summits.

ADVISORY SERVICES

ESCWA offers technical and advisory services to member States and responds to requests to support developmental efforts at national levels. ESCWA conducts training and provides specialized assistance to the development of norms and standards, and the set up and implementation of policies and mechanisms.

PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

ESCWA works in partnership with the League of Arab States and other Arab organizations, and in coordination with regional United Nations entities and country programmes. ESCWA also cultivates partnerships with civil society organizations and networks.

MOVING BEYOND INCOME POVERTY

INCLUSIVE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

ESCWA WORKS ON

- Sustainable development goals and the post-2015 agenda
- Economic governance
- Fiscal policy
- Multidimensional poverty
- Urban poverty
- Gender dimension of poverty
- Informal sector
- Migration and remittances

In recent decades, Arab countries have demonstrated significant progress in a number of social indicators, particularly health, education and housing. This progress, however, has not been consistent neither between nor within Arab countries. At a subregional level, strong differences exist between oil-producing and non-oil-producing countries and least-developed countries and conflict-affected ones. At the subnational level, urban-rural divides continue to be stark, and with urban poverty on the rise in over-crowded cities throughout the region, these divides now cut across communities as well.

In the 1960s and 1970s, around the time of the establishment of ESCWA, the Arab region was riding a wave of economic and social optimism. The welfare state model took hold as post-independence Governments worked to extend the coverage of state services. The state became the primary employer in a number of countries; subsidized food and energy staples ensured that more and more families were able to satisfy their basic needs; and fiscal spending on education and health services consistently increased. By the late 1970s, growth (and remittances) from oil economies had also increased, spurring changes in consumption patterns across the region. Prosperity was on the rise and, soon, so was inequality. By the 1980s and 1990s, like other developing regions, the Arab region had come up against the adverse effects of structural adjustment policies, with shrinking fiscal spaces and diminishing social services. Combined with the spread of corruption and inefficiency in some countries, heavy reliance on oil and the lack of diversification in others, and negative development of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors almost region-wide, Arab countries became increasingly vulnerable to economic shocks. These shocks have invariably left a legacy of poverty, unmet needs and unfulfilled potential.

IT'S NOT AN ISSUE OF INCOME POVERTY...

Using the international poverty line of 1.25 United States dollars ($) a Day, poverty levels in the Arab region appear much lower than they do using national poverty lines that are more reflective of national realities

INTERNATIONAL POVERTY LINE

$1.25 A DAY

4.1%

ARAB REGION

POVERTY RATES IN OTHER REGIONS

EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA	DEVELOPING REGIONS
0.4%	21.4%

OUR COMMITMENT: DEVELOPING REGION-SPECIFIC METHODOLOGIES

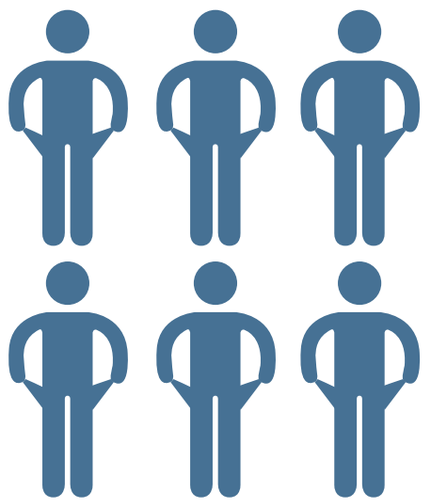
Progress in poverty eradication has largely stagnated over the past 10 to 15 years. However, what poverty is—and how much poverty there is—in the Arab region is still not a matter of consensus. What we can stipulate is that the narrow focus on income poverty, especially as represented by the measure of $1.25 a day, is neither useful nor representative in the region. As a first step, we contend that there are methodological incongruities in the measurement of income poverty as it is applied to the region. To address the inconsistencies in the way poverty measures are used at the national level, ESCWA has been working with the League of Arab States and the Arab Governments to develop a methodology for poverty measurement in the region, including through the harmonization of surveys, indicators and analytical approaches. We are also working on disaggregating data and indicators, along gender lines certainly, but also along varying socioeconomic markers that differentiate between social groups at the national level.

NATIONAL POVERTY LINE

$3.6 A DAY

23.4%

ARAB REGION



The narrow focus on income poverty, especially as represented by the measure of $1.25 a day, is not useful or representative in the region

We also continue to build on the various efforts expended over the years to contribute to a global shift from income poverty to multidimensional poverty. The development discourse in the region has already acknowledged the conceptual shift whereby poverty covers a range of social, economic and even political deficits. From health and education, to access to markets and resources, to voice and participation, at stake is the overall well-being, livelihoods and quality of life of individuals, families and communities. Over the years, and in line with United Nations global efforts, ESCWA has contributed to this paradigm shift with various exercises at the national level in countries as diverse as Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. With the collaboration of various partners, we will also be developing a multidimensional poverty index for the region by 2015, in addition to an innovative method that has already been launched to measure urban poverty in a number of Arab cities, such as Nouakchott, Tunis, Tripoli (Lebanon) and Khartoum.

OUR COMMITMENT: UPHOLDING THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

While we continue to reformulate the money-metric and multidimensional poverty measurements to make them relevant to our region, we should also move beyond a poverty-focused agenda and adopt a broader, more inclusive development agenda. Keeping people and their aspirations at the centre of the development discourse, we should demystify the challenges faced by the region in the economic, social, environmental, food and water security and governance areas, and to create new indexes and indicators. The forthcoming Arab Development Outlook Report 2015 aims to provide a new framework for defining a development measure that takes into consideration current global debates on the post-2015 development agenda, and that can easily be applied to planning and policymaking exercises, particularly in the context of the Arab countries.

ESCWA has played a leading role in supporting the Governments of the region in their progress towards development goals and in tracking, analyzing and tailoring the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to their regional and national contexts. Some of the lessons learned are global; some are specific to the region or subregions. However, all lessons push in the same direction: we should address the totality of the governing social, economic and political structures that organize relations between individuals and groups along lines of income, gender, social belonging, geographical belonging and other categorizations. Over the past two decades, our work on poverty, inequality, and human development has made it clear that poverty is not merely a residual effect of the inefficiency of markets, nor does it reflect a lack of capacity among the poor. Instead, poverty must be understood as a result of the dominant developmental model; it is the model, therefore, that must be the target of reform. The region has created jobs, but not enough, not always in the most sustainable sectors and not necessarily accommodating of the human resources available. Levels of education have increased, but the quality remains far from what is required. Food insecurity and undernourishment cannot be addressed without a framework that brings together rural-urban poverty divides on the one hand, and the nexus of water-energy-food security on the other hand. Many more examples exist. In our work with Arab Governments, therefore, ESCWA supports integrated national and regional development plans that are structurally inclusive, rather than sectoral policies whose successes may be short-lived or short-sighted.

> Poverty must be understood as a result of the dominant developmental model; it is the model, therefore, that must be the target of reform

Testimonial

IBRAHIM EL-ISSAWY

Institute of National Planning, Cairo, Egypt

"It is important that the process of estimating poverty lines be set on humane and ethical grounds. Methods and definitions that would lower the estimate of basic needs to a level that is inconsistent with any notion of well-being or decent life yield misleading results implying low poverty prevalence, thus weakening the will to combat poverty and transforming poverty reduction strategies into ineffective procedures that are modest and irrelevant to the overall development process."

This is also a lesson we take to the global stage, as the world negotiates the post-2015 development agenda. Leading the regional intergovernmental process on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ESCWA is also working to advance an integrated approach to new development goals, one that addresses the totality of the development model along lines that are equitable, inclusive and sustainable. Recalling the impact of instability and violence on human development in countries as different as Iraq, Yemen and the Sudan, ESCWA is also working to ensure that the global development paradigm accords a central place to peace and security.

MOVING FORWARD: REVERSING INEQUALITY AND EXCLUSION

The past three years have brought significant change to the Arab world. Regimes have been toppled alongside orthodoxies. Old fragilities have been exposed and new opportunities to define and defend social justice, the eradication of poverty and inequality have presented themselves. Some countries in the region are experiencing political and institutional transformations and others are experimenting with reforms. ESCWA will continue to work with all countries in the region to ensure that new social contracts accord with a set of guiding principles:

1. Processes of polarization and differentiation must be tackled and the root causes of impoverishment, inequality and exclusion must be addressed at all levels, global, national and subnational.

2. Policies that merely aim to reorganize the distribution of state services and goods will not satisfy the demands of the people, and distributional policies that are not sustainable and inclusive will only aggravate existing threats to social cohesion; thus a rights-based approach to the management of natural, financial and social resources is needed.

3. Social protection must be universal: social protection floors will ensure that every Arab State is able to provide its people with the services and goods necessary not only to satisfy their basic needs, but also to guarantee the dignity of men and women, families and communities.

This is an area ripe for exploration and an opportunity to learn from other developing regions, especially in the context of the sociopolitical upheaval now sweeping the Arab world. We will work to provide the conceptual and practical applications needed to ensure that poverty eradication is not only an end in itself, but a strong contributor to greater social justice overall.

STRIVING FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACROSS BORDERS

REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

ESCWA WORKS ON

- Macroeconomic convergence
- Coordinated social policies
- Financing for development
- Bilateral investment treaties
- WTO negotiations
- Arab customs union
- Integrated transport and infrastructure systems
- Arab development funds
- Public-private partnerships

Testimonial

BADER MALALLAH

Director General, Arab Planning Institute, Kuwait

"Given the low rates of intra-Arab trade and low industrialization ... Arab value chains could be part of a solution for economic problems of slow growth and high unemployment. Arab economies are highly heterogeneous and regional value chains could form a basis for economic integration. Arab expatriates in developed countries could provide the technical skills ..., oil-rich Arab economies have the necessary funds, and large economies have the required labour and market size that would make the value chain production a win-win if the correct policies are implemented."

For decades, the prospect of an integrated Arab economy has been central to the discourse of regional integration. By turns touted as panacea and dismissed as a dream, Arab economic integration remains a grey area in the regional policy landscape. Sixteen years after the introduction of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), and following multiple resolutions and initiatives in support of economic integration, it is difficult to identify a propelling mechanism for regional economic integration or to outline a common, realistic and effective trajectory for its realization. We must acknowledge the disconnects that exist between the available infrastructure, the technical knowledge necessary for implementation and the political framework governing approaches to economic integration in the Arab world. What future, then, for an Arab economy?

OUR COMMITMENT: PROGRESSING WITH—AND BEYOND—GAFTA

Efforts in support of economic integration in the region have largely focused on the facilitation of intraregional trade and its impact on national growth. With the Arab States reporting lower rates of trade among themselves than all other regions of the world, there has been a strong push to encourage intraregional trade with particular emphasis on the reduction of tariff barriers. Complementing those efforts, and in cooperation with the League of Arab States, ESCWA has spearheaded progress in harmonizing transport systems across the region, key to facilitating the mobility of goods across borders. Some growth in intraregional trade has been registered in recent years and there are a number of relevant plans and projects in various stages of implementation, chief among them an Arab customs union, slated for implementation by 2015. However, growth as a result of intraregional trade remains modest, and progress on the implementation of infrastructure and logistical connectivity initiatives is similarly lagging.

Analyzing gaps and opportunities, identifying technical needs and assessing the costs and benefits of different models of integration, ESCWA is working to chart a new way forward for Arab countries, with the aim of redefining Arab economic integration in the years to come. This includes support to planning processes in economies as diverse as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, where regional integration is promoted as an important element of decision-making at the national level. Central to this approach is a conceptualization of economic integration beyond intraregional trade facilitation.

Amassing the lessons of integration over the years and utilizing modeling tools to forecast different scenarios, ESCWA contends that Arab economic integration must first and foremost encompass macroeconomic convergence to facilitate not only intraregional trade, but also stronger participation in global markets.

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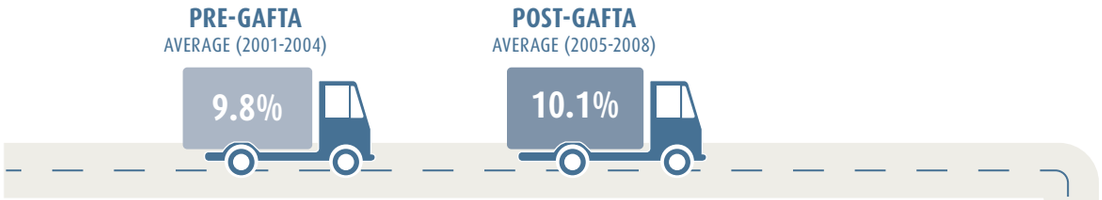
Such convergence—in macroeconomic policies, banking and fiscal policies, national, subregional and regional economic diversification strategies, among others—can spur the development of coordinated Arab value chains across the region and increase foreign direct investment.

AN ARAB ECONOMY FOR AN ARAB WORLD...

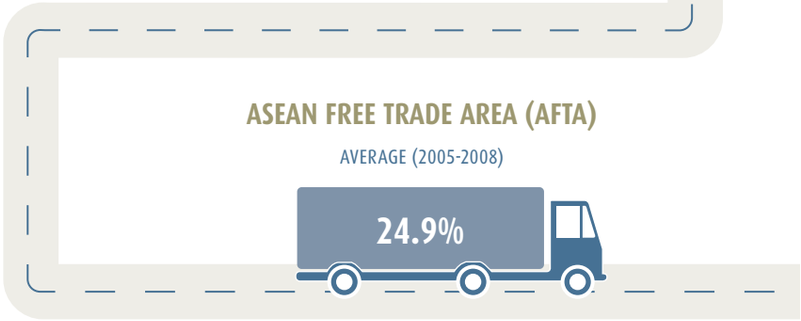
GREATER ARAB FREE TRADE AREA (GAFTA)



Note: GAFTA was signed in 1997 and entered into effect in 2005, while AFTA was signed in 1992 and entered into effect in 1993. Trade refers to the sum of both exports and imports. Source of data: International Monetary Fund (IMF), Direction of Trade Statistics.

10.1%

INTRAREGIONAL TRADE AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL TRADE IN THE ARAB REGION



As a result, intraregional trade will be improved as well as the region's competitiveness in global markets. Without this convergence, GAFTA, an Arab customs union and similar initiatives can only be partially implemented and thus yield only partial results.

In manufacturing and agriculture, employment creation, the management of natural resources and in leveraging technology to promote knowledge economies, we need to support a coordinated vision, coordinated strategies and, hopefully, coordinated benefits. ESCWA is working to provide the scientific knowledge and tools necessary to advance this macroeconomic convergence and support its various mutations across borders and sectors in the region. ESCWA will also continue to support regional efforts to strengthen the enabling infrastructure for economic integration, including through the advancement of GAFTA, the implementation of an Arab customs union, and the promotion of logistical and transport connectivity across the region.

MOVING FORWARD: ADVANCING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION WITHIN A FRAMEWORK OF EQUITY

While it may have emerged as part of a larger historical background of pan-Arabism in the last century, regional economic integration is now more than ever a developmental necessity in the Arab region. From the financial crises that recently swept the world to the political upheavals across the region today, it has become clear that national resilience—to economic, social and political shocks—is only possible within a regional framework that facilitates both integration in equitable global markets and progressive political structures. Therefore, ESCWA will promote economic integration within a larger framework of regional social security, political stability and, ultimately, Arab citizenship. This will involve focusing on a universal social protection floor that is able to address the needs and rights of individuals across national borders. We are working with our partners to collect and analyse the data and propose policies on international and intraregional migration (of men and women) in the Arab world to inform and support our work on economic integration as well as social protection.

To ensure that goods, knowledge and human beings are able to navigate a common landscape with the needed freedom, efficiency and protection, economic convergence policies must be combined with the following:

- Coordinated social policy across the region, addressing issues of migration, social protection and decent job creation for all;

- Political reforms addressing issues of human rights, social justice and rule of law;

- Equity-oriented development policies to overcome barriers that hinder women and vulnerable groups from gaining fair access to services, resources and economic opportunities.

This is the challenge of, and the chance for, inclusive economic development in the region in the years to come. ESCWA, the United Nations and development practitioners must provide the knowledge and tools needed to support this vision, aid in the design of national and regional strategies of economic and social convergence, and build capacities for implementation.

HARNESSING THE POWER OF DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

ESCWA WORKS ON

- National accounts and economic statistics
- Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
- National statistical systems
- Vital and demographic statistics
- Labour and migration statistics
- ICT and the knowledge economy
- Access to ICT
- Mobile and e-government
- Scientific advancement and technology transfer
- Internet governance and cyberlegislation
- Digital Arabic content

Over many decades, Arab Governments have exerted a concerted efforts to shake off the trappings of colonialism and instability, and to accelerate the pace of industrialization and economic development. This drive, however, has been accompanied by a prevailing sense of knowledge deficit, a significant regression from the golden age of Arab progress, when the region was a leader in the production and consumption of science, art and literature. Today, by contrast, the region is marked by low rates of publishing and translation, a scarcity of investment in scholarly research and inadequate institutional support for innovation across the sciences and the humanities. This decline has direct impact on the course of development in the region.

For the past 40 years, ESCWA has worked tirelessly to advocate for knowledge-based development planning, the importance of research and analysis, and access to knowledge and information as a fundamental human right. We work with the conviction that a developed society is necessarily a knowledge society. At stake are not only better development policies for deeper impact, but also more empowered citizens—and thus greater, more sustainable development.

OUR COMMITMENT: INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE IN PLANNING PROCESSES

Of specific importance to the Arab region is the need for accessible, reliable and comparable data. This need has been acknowledged by the United Nations as well as Governments, regional development entities, civil society organizations, think tanks and experts. Over the years, ESCWA has worked hand in hand with a number of Governments to improve the national infrastructure for statistics, in line with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. In addition, we have supported the introduction of regulatory frameworks for the production and management of data, ensuring that data produced nationally and regionally is compliant with international standards. Particular emphasis is placed on innovative and regionally relevant gender statistics as well as the disaggregation of data by gender.

Since the 1990s, ESCWA has actively promoted an integrated approach to the production and consumption of data through a region-wide strategy to implement the System of National Accounts. With every step forward, this strategy is refining its focus. Using consistent classifications and definitions and based on the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) and the Social Accounting Matrix (SAM), we are promoting a national accounts framework that registers social and environmental variables in addition to economic variables. The outcome is economic, environmental and social matrices that provide a comprehensive analytical lens for accurate and inclusive development planning across sectors. This work will continue in the years to come.

ESCWA has also been working diligently in partnership with member States to support e-government as an enabler of integrated

Testimonial

OLA AWAD

Director, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)

"With the help of ESCWA, we have been able to train a number of in-house experts in various areas of statistics: price indices, national accounts, labour force (informal sector), etc. In addition, ESCWA helped to strengthen statistical coordination among the Arab countries and also helped in adopting and applying the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. It is also worth mentioning that ESCWA participated actively in all events and conferences of Palestine, and contributed to bridging the gaps between the statistical offices and the policy and decision makers. We at PCBS are very grateful for the supporting role of ESCWA that helped PCBS to face challenging conditions and to manage work under the exceptional conditions of occupation."

ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE...

CURRENT INTERNET PENETRATION

WORLD 35.7%

12.4% GROWTH (2005 - 2012)

ARAB REGION 34.8%

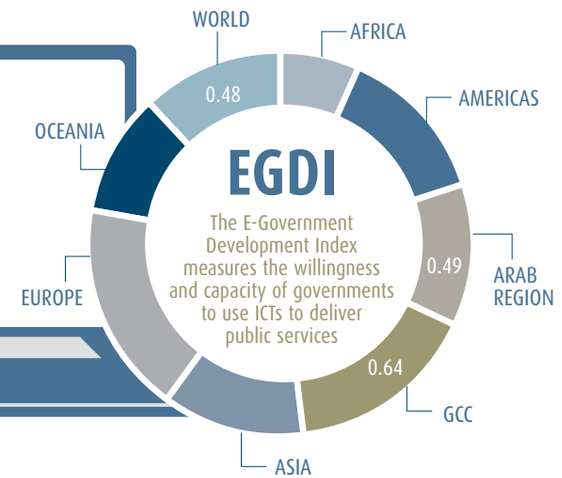
21.9% GROWTH (2005 - 2012)

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES 27.5%

19.2% GROWTH (2005-2012)

ARAB COUNTRIES THAT HAVE ADOPTED LAWS ON FREEDOM OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION: TUNISIA, JORDAN, YEMEN

Arabic language on the Internet is ranked 6TH WORLDWIDE



planning, efficient and equitable service delivery and participatory citizenship. While already making marked progress in some countries, ESCWA is expanding its support to mobile government, with the aim of increasing access and expanding services even further. ESCWA will also lead regional initiatives to measure e-governance and its developmental impact, as well as its role in increasing access and exposure to knowledge and information among public sector workers on the one hand, and between Government and citizenry on the other hand.

OUR COMMITMENT: MAKING TECHNOLOGY ACCESSIBLE AND RELEVANT

The Arab region is young in its demographics, a reality that has made the need for creative, non-traditional methods of accessing and sharing information more pressing. This need results in part from the inadequacies of the existing infrastructure (internet, electricity, even schools in some places); the inaccessibility of this infrastructure, especially among poorer populations and those in remote areas, and in some cases women and girls; and the poor understanding of the potential of existing technologies. In collaboration with the League of Arab States, ESCWA has launched a number of regional initiatives to promote the digital Arabic content industry and the Arab identity in cyberspace, and improve the quality of Arabic content on the web, through the development of the Arabic internet domain names system (ADNS).

ESCWA promotes new technologies to serve the knowledge needs of the region. We work with Governments to enhance the legislative and regulatory framework, ICT policies, and cyberlegislation, as well as the infrastructure necessary to harness the benefits of technology. We work with other United Nations entities, civil society organizations and experts to investigate the practical applications of technology on the ground and for local development needs. And we advance the principle that accessing and localizing technological knowledge is part and parcel of human development in the region. With the set up of the ESCWA Technology Centre in Amman, Jordan, the first of its kind in the region, we are helping to promote technology and innovation for inclusive social and economic development.

Testimonial

SAMI BEYDOUN
Managing Partner at Berytech Fund

"Working with ESCWA's Technology Centre in Amman, we were able to support the efforts of "Cook & Eat Lebanese", an on-line portal set up by a group of young innovators, with a $250,000 investment. Initiatives like these are new to the region, and are an integral part of the more complex ecosystem of entrepreneurship and job creation. A regional forum like this provides a much needed space for regional cooperation, learning, and exchange."

MOVING FORWARD: PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE FOR EMPOWERMENT

As some countries succeed in providing the necessary institutions, infrastructure and frameworks for the production and sharing of data and information, whether this knowledge is locally produced or imported, ESCWA continues to advocate equal access to information across the region. Arab coutries must democratize access to knowledge across subregions, income groups, age groups, genders, ethnicities and various social identities. In matters of data and statistics, research and analysis, or the use of new technologies, ESCWA works to change or introduce policies across the region to facilitate equal access to information and technology.

As the region endures a period of protracted social and political unrest, ESCWA and its partners face new challenges and consider new opportunities in promoting public, transparent and inclusive access to knowledge—especially knowledge necessary for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of development policies. In the years to come, greater transparency will be required of Governments and of the United Nations. There is a palpable sense of growing public interest in the Arab region in data and information on governance and human rights, but also on all matters related to social, economic and environmental development. Equal access to the necessary knowledge, as well as to new and innovative technologies, is a necessity and an enabler of participatory politics in the years to come.

ADVOCATING FULL RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

EMPOWERED ARAB WOMEN

ESCWA WORKS ON

- Gender mainstreaming
- CEDAW
- Beijing Platform for Action
- Women in conflict settings
- Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security
- Gender statistics
- Violence against women
- Economic and political participation of women
- ICT for the empowerment of women

Gender equality, both in the Arab world and globally, is a concrete benchmark of human development and human rights. Unequivocally universal, the issue of the equality of women and men and its centrality to developmental progress has been a United Nations priority in the region for decades. It continues to challenge Governments, activists and development practitioners as gains and setbacks in women's rights fluctuate across the geographical and political map of the Arab world. The recent uprisings in the region have highlighted achievements and challenges in the struggle for gender equality, and have opened up new possibilities for taking this struggle forward.

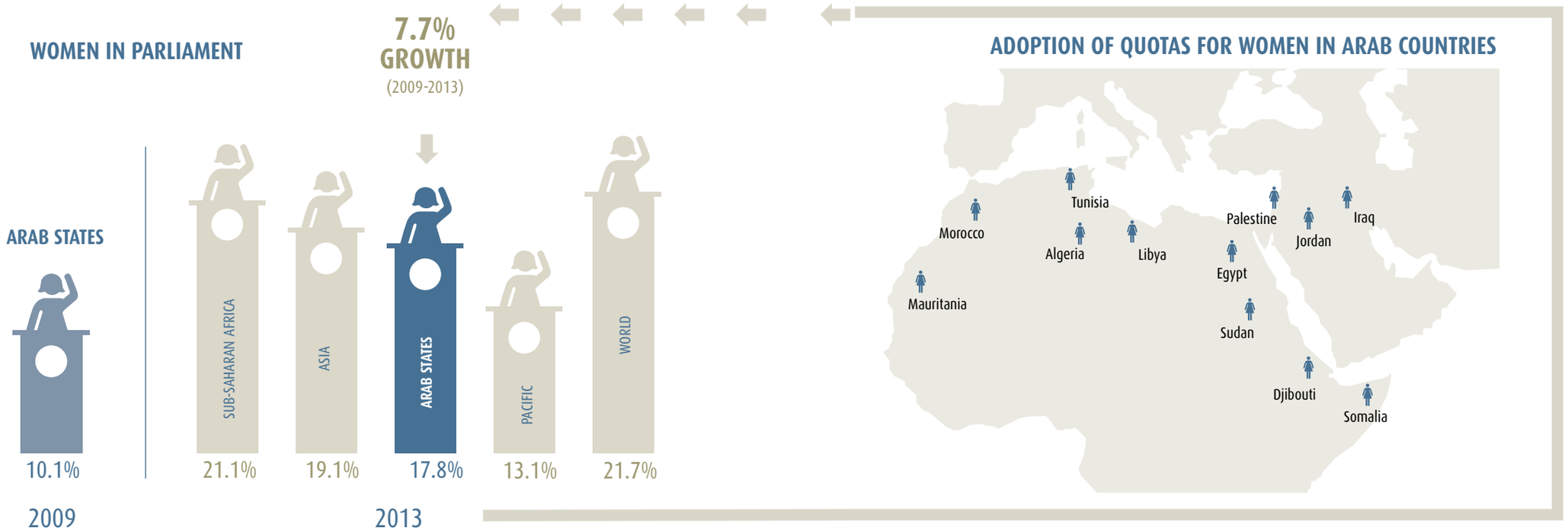
As ESCWA marks 40 years of work in the Arab world, we celebrate a number of gains for women, most significantly in equal access to education. If MDGs are taken as a representative measure of human development, then it must be acknowledged that Arab countries have made significant progress towards gender equality, notably in the areas of health and education. It is equally noted, however, that Arab women lag behind women in other regions in terms of economic as well as political participation. The challenges are structural, legal and sociocultural.

OUR COMMITMENT: ENDING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

While MDGs helped to galvanize national efforts to improve health and education indicators for women all over the world, they have stopped short of addressing discriminatory structural obstacles to the empowerment of women and girls across the legal, social, economic, political and cultural spheres. In the Arab world, those obstacles have sometimes been defended under the slogan of cultural or religious specificity. They include reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and affect areas as diverse as personal status laws, nationality laws, freedom of movement, access to financial resources, political participation and representation, and protection from bodily harm and gender-based violence. Partnering with Governments and women's organizations—both those supported by the state and grassroots movements—

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION...

THE ADOPTION OF QUOTAS IN SOME ARAB COUNTRIES RESULTED IN SIGNIFACANT INCREASES IN THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN



ESCWA has worked diligently to create understanding, eliminate fallacies, and support regional and national capacities in the implementation of CEDAW. Providing analytical studies and resources as well as direct technical support, we continue to promote the development of national plans and strategies that are inclusive, gender-sensitive and empowering of women and girls across all sectors of development. In part, this includes analyzing the impact of discrimination against women on various aspects of development. ESCWA also remains committed to the production and analysis of gender-disaggregated data, and to building institutional capacity across the region for gender-sensitive approaches to development. There is a significant lack of legislation in the Arab region either to prevent discrimination and violence against women, or to promote gender equality. We work closely with policymakers, national institutions and civil society organizations to address legal gaps. We also work with partners accross the Arab region to support the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, acheive progress in the empowerment of women and girls and advance gender equality.

ESCWA also works to promote women's rights in situations of instability, from the occupation of Palestine to the protracted conflicts in Iraq and Yemen and the expanding violence in the Syrian Arab Republic. Upholding the rights of women enshrined in Security Council resolution 1325 is an ESCWA priority. Safeguarding the bodily integrity of women and girls, whether in peacetime or in the midst of war, is a human right and developmental imperative in the Arab region.

Testimonial

NOUZHA SKALLI
Member of the House of Representatives, Morocco, Former Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity

"Two decades after ratification, Morocco has finally lifted all reservations to CEDAW. Morocco has also inscribed gender equality at the core of its new Constitution.... The remarkable struggle of Moroccan women for their rights and dignity, and the political will at the highest levels of the State ... were most certainly inspired by a strong determination to do justice to women. The international process driven by the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action has been an essential source of inspiration and strength and has given Moroccan women's cause undisputable universal legitimacy."

MOVING FORWARD: SUPPORTING WOMEN AS FULL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC AGENTS

Two directives govern the way forward in the region:

1. New social contracts and political structures must acknowledge and create the space for the equal role of women and men in public life, including through legislative reforms that guarantee women's access to and representation in decision-making bodies;

2. New economic paradigms, plans and policies must account for the potential and promote the equal participation of women in the economy, including through full access to and control of economic resources.

It is as empowered agents of change that Arab women will be best placed to push for the transformation needed to achieve full gender equality in different countries and contexts. Gains are being made as both Governments and civil society push for a stronger presence of women in public life and as more women are appointed to higher positions in decision-making institutions.

As the United Nations, Governments, institutions and non-governmental organizations collaborate to provide the political and technical support needed for the years to come, it must be acknowledged that the Arab uprisings have generated a new discourse and new momentum for women's rights. This includes instances of courageous resistance to harassment and sexual violence, renewed calls to challenge discriminatory personal status laws and pioneering initiatives to strengthen the voice of Arab women in the public sphere. The Arab Uprisings have also energized the debate on women's participation in decision-making bodies and institutions at the local and national levels. Yemen and Tunisia both made explicit provisions for stronger female participation in national dialogue and State-building. Making use of United Nations instruments and human rights legislation, ESCWA will work with emerging actors, youth groups and all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to push for policy change, challenge dormant assumptions, and support an Arab movement for gender equality across institutional and geographical divides.

There is a significant lack of legislation in the Arab region either to prevent discrimination and violence against women, or to promote gender equality

As defenders and advocates of human rights, the United Nations and all signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must insist that women's full political, economic and social rights are indivisible; they are a foundational pillar of a human rights regime and cannot be promoted in half-measure or half-heartedly. As the region continues to undergo a period of transformation, it is clear that the full emancipation of the Arab person cannot be achieved without the full emancipation of Arab women and girls.

INCREASING RESILIENCE, EQUITY AND INNOVATION

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

ESCWA WORKS ON

- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Water, energy and food security
- Promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions
- Water supply and sanitation
- Economic and environmental impact of energy subsidies
- Green economy

The Arab region is one of the richest in terms of oil and gas reserves; it is also the poorest in terms of fresh water resources. Its pattern of socioeconomic development is at times impressive, but often uneven. There is moreover a growing realization that, across the planet, human patterns of consumption are unsustainable. Governments in the Arab region work to balance the need to accelerate socioeconomic progress with the imperative of regulating the consumption of natural resources. To do so, greener, more equitable and more sustainable development pathways must be followed. Our collective ability to manage natural resources sustainably will be tested further in the future. As Arab countries consider new possibilities, including nuclear energy, both the benefits and risks must be thought of and alternatives should be weighed diligently, in a politically charged regional and global context.

ESCWA works closely and systematically with Arab Governments, and in collaboration with the League of Arab States, to steer a course of sustainable development in the region. Through regional initiatives, studies, policy advice and negotiated consensus among Arab countries, we have helped the region to position itself in global sustainable development summits and pursue regional approaches to increasing energy efficiency, diversifying the energy mix to include renewable energy options, establishing green help desks to support enterprises and entrepreneurs, and improving the monitoring and management of water in Arab countries.

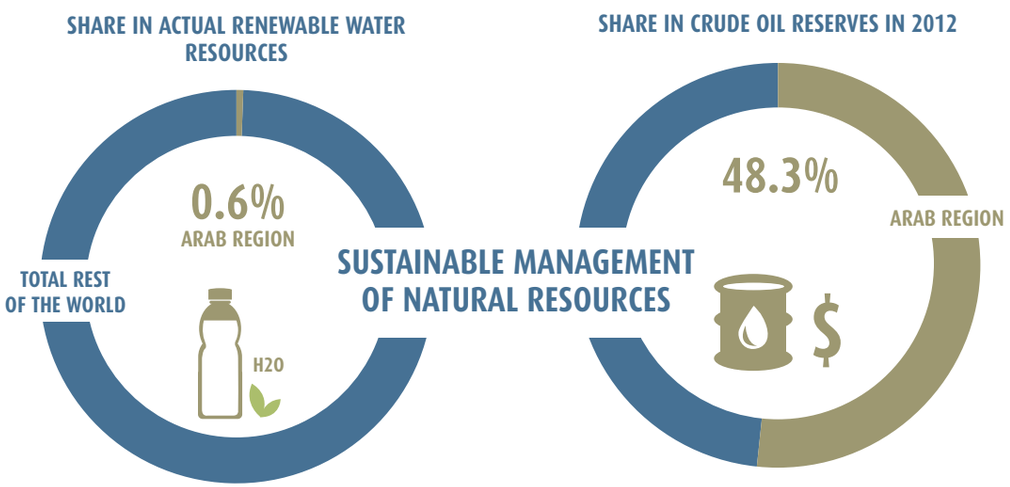
Testimonial

DJAMEL EDDINE DJABALLAH
Director, Environment, Housing, Water and Sustainable Development Department, League of Arab States

"The League of Arab States appreciates the close partnership that has developed with ESCWA over the past decades, and particularly the continuous support it provides for fostering Arab dialogue and preparations for global conferences such as Rio+20. ESCWA's technical assistance in the area of water, climate change and meteorology has launched new regional initiatives that are helping Arab countries to work together on common challenges, such as shared water resources, climate change and a road map towards a green economy."

ARAB REGION'S SHARE OF RENEWABLE WATER RESOURCES AND CRUDE OIL RESERVES...

OIL MAY CREATE WEALTH BUT WITHOUT FRESH WATER LIFE IS NOT VIABLE



OUR COMMITMENT: BUILDING REGIONAL CAPACITIES AND RESILIENCE

Arab countries, along with much of the developing world, place historical responsibility for climate change on the developed world. This historical responsibility has been affirmed in major United Nations summits, including the Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which upheld the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" for reducing emissions that affect the global climate. In so doing, Arab countries insist that developed countries must play a leading role in mitigating the effects of climate change and have an obligation to share knowledge and technologies to aid global mitigation efforts. As a regional commission, ESCWA played a key role in consolidating the Arab position at the Rio+20 negotiations and advising climate change negotiators. It continues to provide decision makers with the technical and political advice needed to strengthen the voice of the region in global forums.

While acknowledging the importance of multilateral action on climate change mitigation, ESCWA is also assisting Arab countries to enhance their scientific capabilities in assessing and adapting to climate change and extreme weather events such as floods and droughts. This includes the ability to analyse and model impact, develop harmonized databases, and assess current and future vulnerability to climate change.

"Any concept of green economy to be agreed upon in the future shall not imply that the green economy is an alternative for sustainable development but rather a tool to achieve it. The opportunities and challenges of a green economy shall be assessed, in addition to the required means of implementation, primarily funding, transfer and localization of appropriate technology, capacity-building and provision of technical support to developing countries".

Outcome document of the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), 16-17 October 2011, organized by ESCWA in close cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme

OUR COMMITMENT: A ROAD MAP FOR REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The socioeconomic development of a number of Arab countries is closely linked to developments in the energy sector. The production of energy is often a lifeline, with direct impact on a country's gross domestic product. ESCWA works with Arab countries to define the potential and the limitations of our dependency on the energy sector and analyse the sustainability of current production and consumption patterns. Recognizing that hydrocarbon sources are finite energy sources, ESCWA is acting region-wide to promote more rational consumption of energy and cleaner, renewable energies, including solar and wind power. Working holistically, we emphasize the need to link energy efficiency and renewable energy to the innovative creation of jobs for the region's youth, and to the empowerment of women and poverty reduction.

However, the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy in the region is not without its difficulties as Governments struggle to balance between the imperatives of growth, efficiency and social support. Efforts are often derailed by limited access to financing for pursuing investments in new technologies and sometimes by ineffective or stagnant management of subsidy systems. ESCWA therefore advocates the study of different and tailored models of providing energy services at affordable costs within an overall framework of social justice. In addition, we encourage innovation and the provision of opportunities for generating green jobs in new sectors that can attract young graduates. Moreover, we contend that such strategies must be bolstered by regional energy networks: electrical grids, gas networks and liquefied natural gas chains serve not only to satisfy the needs of Arab countries, diverse in their natural resources, but also help lay the ground work for broader economic regional integration.

Testimonial

HRH PRINCE HASSAN BIN TALAL OF JORDAN on The Inventory of Shared Water Resources in Western Asia, launched by ESCWA and partners in October 2013

"Like joined-up handwritting, the geography, geology and geophysics show where the natural and physical environments meet. Only when we begin to think in these terms can we claim to have good governance."

MOVING FORWARD: ENDORSING THE NEXUS OF ENERGY-WATER-FOOD SECURITY

Twelve out of 22 Arab countries fall below the acute water scarcity level of 500 cubic metres (m3) per capita per year, while five others hover at the water poverty threshold of 1000 m3 per capita per year. In other words, fresh water resources in the Arab region are dangerously low and diminishing, and water security is under serious threat.

The majority of water resources are often shared across national borders, in the context of complex political realities. The sound management of surface and groundwater resources is therefore a top regional priority.

Working with the Arab Ministerial Water Council, Governments, international partners and regional experts, ESCWA promotes the integrated management of water resources. It has contributed to the development of regional knowledge bases to inform cooperation with innovative analysis, maps and assessments. Crucial to these efforts is the promotion of the water-energy-food security nexus as a planning and organizing framework for the region.

ESCWA works to highlight the linkages between water scarcity, food security and climate change, and their implications for energy efficiency, agricultural employment, human rights and poverty eradication. We strive to minimize the negative impacts of water scarcity and promote a sustainable approach to agricultural development.

This integrated approach is central to the post-2015 development agenda and the formulation of a set of SDGs. ESCWA is working closely with Governments, the League of Arab States and civil society to support the Arab intergovernmental process on SDGs and the formulation of a strong, coherent regional position on the new development agenda.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF CRISIS

ESCWA WORKS ON

- Post-conflict development
- Transition and political transformation
- Political polarization and sectarianism
- Governance
- Public sector modernization and decentralization
- Participatory development and CSO engagement
- Development in least developed countries

Instability has been an issue of chronic concern for the Arab region, which has witnessed debilitating wars and protracted crises over decades, in countries such as Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, the Sudan and Yemen. More recently, violence has broken out in countries undergoing political and institutional transformations; at the time of writing, a devastating civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic has entered its fourth year. In addition, the entire Arab region continues to grapple with the repercussions of the occupation of Palestine, the only long-term occupation in contemporary history; and the region hosts the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide. Political shocks often result in developmental setbacks, episodes of social disintegration and economic regression. A number of developmental priorities, especially those related to the rights of women, the environment, or disadvantaged social groups, are often sidelined in a bid to shore up national unity in the face of political instability. At the same time, however, there are encouraging achievements, as consensus is negotiated among key political actors and social groups around constitutional processes and as efforts are expended to invigorate the work of civil society and enshrine political plurality, or strengthen national dialogue.

Starting in 2008, ESCWA made explicit programmatic provisions for tackling development under conflict and crisis. Working with Governments, think tanks and national partners, we channel regional and international knowledge and methodologies on sustaining development in unstable conditions, with a focus on strengthening States. Now, more than ever, we also focus on empowering citizens and building inclusive governance mechanisms and structures.

OUR COMMITMENT: BUILDING RESPONSIVE, INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT INSTITUTIONS

Investigating the root causes of political crises is vital to the formulation of policies that contribute to both political stability and social cohesion. In the Arab region, this means identifying the modalities, tracking the trends and addressing the impact of economic disparities, social exclusion and the rise of sectarian and subnational identities in recent years. It requires a methodical investigation of the impact of conflict and instability on women and girls. In addition to the analytical work on the broad manifestations and consequences of such phenomena, ESCWA has also worked with the Governments of Iraq, Lebanon, the Sudan and Yemen on developing national frameworks to mitigate the effects of crises and support national dialogue processes in some cases. We are also concentrating our efforts to address post-conflict development in the Syrian Arab Republic, acknowledging that the challenges there are tremendous, and the human catastrophe will have repercussions on the entire region for years to come.

Central to all of these efforts is our commitment to building state institutions that are representative, transparent, accountable and efficient. Strengthening the state as a set of institutions that represent and serve the interests of all citizens, populations and social groups—whether minorities, women, youth, or people with disabilities—is paramount. Making the linkages between social justice, social equality and social peace, this approach stipulates that crises are often the result of imbalances or biases, and are best mitigated or even avoided through structural reform to institutions such as the security apparatus, public service ministries, national media, parliaments and local councils, to name a few. It is state institutions, broadly defined, that organize relations between individuals and social groups, and between these and the state. We support the reform and modernization of public sector institutions to ensure that those relations are healthy and equitable.

Crucial to this focus on institutions is the concept of democratic governance. The recent global development frameworks—from the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration and the 2012 Conference on Sustainable Development to the documents that are currently informing the post-2015 development agenda—have acknowledged that governance is profoundly linked to development and that both concepts are mutually reinforcing in fighting poverty and preventing conflict. Today, respect for human rights and the rule of law, transparency and accountability, equal access to justice, active citizen participation and inclusive institutions are powerful enablers of peace and stability and must form an integral part of any effort directed towards promoting sustainable development.

It is the position of ESCWA that the region is in need of an organic movement that seeks to foster a culture and institutions of participatory, democratic governance. Working with governmental and non-governmental institutions, ESCWA is launching a region-wide effort to develop the necessary methodologies to assess (and by implication improve) modalities of governance in the Arab region. This process will include developing governance indicators that are meaningful, responsive and inclusive in the context of transition countries and those undergoing processes of reform. This work will involve the international community, civil society and Governments, creating a sense of national ownership over the exercise, so that it may become an integral part of each country's progress towards sustainable and inclusive development.

Testimonial

RASHA JARHOUM
Social Affairs Consultant, Yemen

"ESCWA's Manual on Capacity-Building for Partnerships in Democratic Governance has proven very useful to us as activists especially in the context of the transitions in the Arab world. It provides real cases and lessons from successful and unsuccessful experiences globally... and practical tools that are very much in need today, not only for the youth but those in government and NGOs as well".

Today, respect for human rights and the rule of law, transparency and accountability, equal access to justice, active citizen participation and inclusive institutions are powerful enablers of peace and stability and must form an integral part of any effort directed towards promoting sustainable development

THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE...

SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS AND THE FOURTH GENEVA CONVENTION

- SECURITY COUNCIL: 36 RESOLUTIONS VIOLATED OR NOT IMPLEMENTED
- FOURTH GENEVA CONVENTION: AT LEAST 50 ARTICLES VIOLATED

18 SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS DEMANDING ISRAELI COMPLIANCE WITH THE FOURTH GENEVA CONVENTION

EAST JERUSALEM

23,378,000 m²

of Palestinian land expropriated

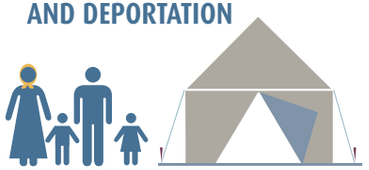
15 Security Council resolutions +24 Fourth Geneva Convention articles: The occupation is not to change the status and nature of East Jerusalem

- In 1980, Israel officially annexed Esat Jerusalem
- 15,000 Palestinians de facto expelled from the city
- 2,800 homes and other Palestinian structures demolished
- 200,000 Israeli settlers currently residing in East Jerusalem
- Discriminatory and restrictive housing and planning laws

5.3 million

registered Palestinian refugees

REFUGEES, DISPLACEMENT AND DEPORTATION



13 Security Council resolutions +18 Fourth Geneva Convention articles: The occupation is not to expel civilians from their land or destroy their property

- 270,000 Palestinians expelled from the occupied territory since 1967
- 25,500 Palestinian homes and other structures demolished since 1967
- More than half of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory are refugees

PRISONERS

760,000 Palestinians

imprisoned by Israeli forces

1 Security Council resolution +21 Fourth Geneva Convention articles: The occupation is to respect prisoners' rights especially children

- 760,000 Palestinians including 15,000 Palestinian children imprisoned by Israeli forces (1967-2010)
- 700 Palestinian children prosecuted in Israeli military courts each year
- 125 Palestinian prisoners dead due to torture or medical neglect
- Systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian prisoners (including torture)
- Evidence whitheld from prisoners and defense attorneys

ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS AND SETTLERS

40% of West Bank land allocated to Israeli settlement

3 Security Council resolutions +11 Fourth Geneva Convention articles: The occupation is not to conduct settlement activity in Palestine

- 536,932 Israeli settlers in 150 settlements
- Israeli government provides 57% more grants per capita to Israeli settlements than to local authorities in Israel
- 3,423 settler attacks in 2013 (up to 11 November)
- Over 90% of monitored complaints on settler violence closed without indictment

COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT AND USE OF FORCE

1.7 million

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip under blockade since 2007

10 Security Council resolutions +31 Fourth Geneva Convention articles: The occupation is not to punish civilians for actions they did not commit

- At least 1,351 Palestinian children killed by Israeli soldiers or settlers between 2000 and 2011
- 68% of the West Bank off-limits to Palestinians
- 67 kilometers of roads in the West Bank reserved exclusively for Israelis

LAND AND RESOURCES

Only 11% of West Bank water allocated to Palestinians

9 Security Council resolutions +9 Fourth Geneva Convention articles: The occupation is not to confiscate, deplete or endanger natural resources including land

- The West Bank Wall: Isolating 170,000 m² of fertile land (10% of the West Bank) and 58 water sources
- 10 Israeli quarries and 160 industrial facilities operating illegally in the occupied territory
- Gaza "no-go zones": wasting 35% of agricultural land; allocating only 3 out of 200 nautical miles for fishing

OUR COMMITMENT: BUILDING A CIVIC CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Democratic governance, human rights and inclusive development cannot exist in a vacuum of state institutions and official politics. Preserving social peace, social equality and social justice also requires the promotion of a civic culture of human rights and the fostering of an active, empowered citizenry.

The promotion of a civic culture of human rights entails promoting robust social institutions—civil society organizations and collectives at local, national and regional levels that engage with policies and contribute directly to State-building and development. ESCWA continues to develop and tailor a participatory development approach that has been endorsed by the League of Arab States and translated on the ground into technical material used by civil society actors, as well as Governments and intergovernmental mechanisms. The aim is to ensure that civil society actors, including women and youth groups, help shape agendas, contribute to implementation, and hold themselves and the Government accountable for results. ESCWA has applied this approach to situations as diverse as the establishment of local community funds; the promotion of national dialogue in countries in transition; and to global forums like the Rio+20 negotiations and, most recently, the post-2015 development agenda discussions.

"At this moment of history, let us work together to build prosperous and open societies throughout the Arab world, founded in fairness, justice and opportunity for all. Let us work together to make this better for all regardless of religion, regardless of sex, regardless of ethnicity, poor and rich, small and big. That is the priority of the United Nations."

BAN KI-MOON
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS
Keynote address at the ESCWA High-Level Meeting on Reform and Transitions to Democracy. Beirut, 15 January 2012

MOVING FORWARD: PROMOTING THE FOURTH PILLAR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The recent political transformations in the region do not change the fact that it is imperative to build stronger, more inclusive state institutions and promote a civic culture. These events have, however, invigorated the regional discussion on types of democratic governance and tested the potential and limitations of civic action in a more concrete manner than ever before.

Now is the time to refine our understanding and application of concepts like "constitutional democracy", "rule of law", "neutral state apparatus", "independent judiciary" and others. Moving forward, ESCWA is working to consolidate this regional momentum and ensure that it is linked clearly to the emerging global development paradigm. We insist that a post-2015 development agenda and any new development paradigm must consist of four pillars: economy, society, environment and politics.

In practice, this will translate into normative work, policy formulation, technical services and advocacy efforts to ensure that every woman and every man, and every boy and every girl in the Arab region will be addressed as a rights-bearer; peace and security will be considered development goals and part of an enabling environment; and programmes and policies will be formulated and evaluated according to their ability to respect the rights and equality of all within their reach.

STRENGTHENING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT

SHAPING THE FUTURE

ESCWA WORKS ON

- Youth empowerment
- Population dynamics
- Youth participation in institutional politics
- Youth and knowledge society
- Civic values and life skills for youth

Youth in the Arab world are a force to be reckoned with. One in every five persons in the region is aged between 15 and 24. They demand more and better jobs; they challenge existing and often inadequate educational structures and push the boundaries of established social and cultural norms. In large part, youth also drive the momentum to link their societies to globalized knowledge economies. Recent uprisings have catapulted young people to centre stage in national and regional politics. While the Arab uprisings have yet to set a clear course for political transformation in the countries of the region, they have demonstrated that young Arab men and women are effectively engaged in making and remaking their societies. By forming the leading force of the protests calling for freedom and social justice, and engaging in critical assessments of proposed modalities of transition, Arab youth are articulating a clear desire, and a clear intent, to set the development agenda in the region. Arab youth are already asserting their role as participants in the reimagination and transformation of their societies, with implications for social contracts and political structures, social and economic policies, action on the environment, and the definition of civic culture and engagement.

At ESCWA, we believe that Governments must adopt the necessary strategies and put in place the appropriate mechanisms to empower young men and women as agents of change. Youth should not be perceived as a security concern, an economic burden on public service infrastructure, or a sectoral issue to be added to national development plans. We work to ensure that national, regional and global frameworks provide the environment and the mechanisms needed to maximize the inclusive, empowering engagement of youth in social, economic, political, cultural and environmental development.

OUR COMMITMENT: PROMOTING INTEGRATED, PARTICIPATORY YOUTH POLICIES

Policymakers in the region are increasingly recognizing the need to formulate national youth policies and action plans, aimed not only at fostering youth human capital development but also at providing young people with the opportunity to attain their full potential in terms of education, health, employment and participation in public and political life. Out of 22 Arab countries, about half have either developed youth policies or are in the process of formulating them.

The research, policy advice and technical assistance of ESCWA to member States are focused on the development of comprehensive and participatory youth strategies. We promote our approach with research and data; by building individual and institutional capacities; and by facilitating dialogue and engagement. The strategic thrust of our work is twofold:

1. Youth strategies must be developed in consultation with youth and not simply for them. We provide the frameworks and mechanisms needed to support dialogue and reciprocity between youth-led civil society and policymakers;

2. Youth strategies must be integrated across all sectors. We identify the gaps and clarify the linkages between different sectoral approaches to maximize the success of a holistic approach to national youth policies.

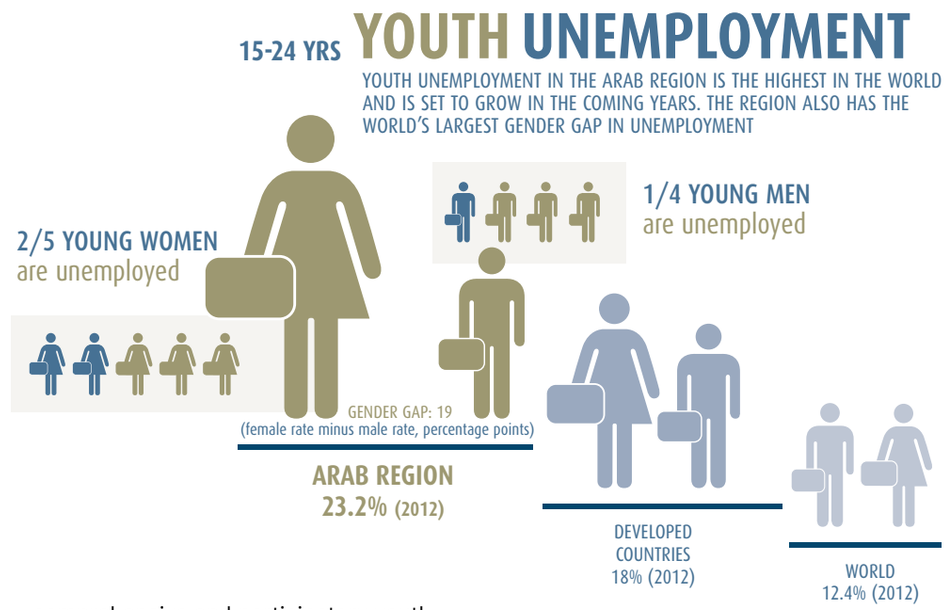
Central to this work is the conviction that sectoral policies can only lead to quick-fixes and containment approaches that are neither successful nor sustainable in the medium to the long term. We have witnessed numerous policies of this kind across the region, from employment schemes that aim to increase the recruitment of youth in the public sector to educational reforms that focus on increasing youth participation in tertiary education. Such initiatives place undue and unrealistic demands on the public sector, and miss the connections between quality of education, development of skills and market demands. More importantly, however, an integrated approach to a national youth policy would address issues such as employment or education within

Testimonial

CEDRIC CHOUKEIR
Regional Director, World Youth Alliance, Middle East

"Through its partnership with the Middle East office of the World Youth Alliance, ESCWA has been instrumental in opening a direct channel of communication between young people and the key government officials who develop national youth policies."

YOUTH ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY REPRESENTED AMONG THE UNEMPLOYED



Out of 22 Arab countries, about half have either developed youth policies or are in the process of formulating them

a framework that acknowledges the role and impact of economic structures, social and cultural values, migration trends and gender disparities. In addition, the skills and capabilities of young men and women and their ability to respond to market needs must be addressed within a framework encompassing issues of governance, voice and participation in public life. An integrated approach to national youth policies would highlight and tackle the linkages between employment and education; rates of volunteerism in the Arab region; intraregional migration trends and social protection within and across national borders. Such an approach would also address the deficiencies of macroeconomic policies, and discriminatory practices and barriers to social mobility.

Central to our approach to youth policies in general, and youth employment in particular, is the promotion of a gendered development lens. Young women in the region face additional gender-based structural and societal barriers to economic and political participation. In fact, female youth in the region account for the bulk of unemployed Arab youth and for the markedly high rate of youth unemployment relative to other regions. Of the almost 23 per cent of unemployed youth in the region, a large number is female: two out of every five young women currently seeking employment in the region remain unemployed, while the ratio for young men is about one in four. These figures are particularly striking given that in some Arab countries, more women hold university degrees than men. While stunted female participation in the labour market must be addressed within the context of women's overall empowerment, it should also be targeted within the framework of national policies for reducing youth unemployment. Doing so would necessitate tackling the totality of discriminatory laws and practices that hold women—especially young women—back. ESCWA advocates national youth policies that are explicitly gendered.

OUR COMMITMENT: ENDORSING YOUTH STRATEGIES AS PART OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Formulating a national youth policy as part and parcel of national development planning encourages Governments to view youth empowerment as part of the solution across different sectors, especially given the ability of young people to absorb and utilize new knowledge and technologies. At ESCWA, we believe in promoting youth leadership across the region, keeping in mind the vital importance of innovation and creativity for the creation of green jobs; the promotion of renewable energies; the building of a knowledge economy; and the enhancement of regional integration. We have actively engaged youth groups in consultations at national and regional levels to aid in setting goals and negotiating consensus and commitment in areas as diverse as climate change adaptation and mitigation, cyberlegislation, and the post-2015 development agenda.

In order to provide the needed support to Arab countries in designing and implementing such responsive and participatory national youth strategies and policies, ESCWA has adapted the global United Nations framework on youth—the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)—to regional needs. WPAY is the only comprehensive and flexible global framework to address the totality of youth concerns, from health, education, hunger and poverty to juvenile justice, voice and participation. Through dialogue with policymakers, civil society and the private sector, we have prepared a purpose-built toolkit for youth policy reform, already piloted in Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen. We also work with youth-led civil society organizations, the League of Arab States and other United Nations entities to provide tailored support to individual countries in evaluating policies, analyzing national youth surveys and developing indicators to measure the impact of different policies.

MOVING FORWARD: ADVOCATING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE TO ENHANCE AND CONSOLIDATE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

While Arab youth have emerged as key actors in current transformations in the region, they play this role against an institutional background that has for the most part marginalized them. The voting age in most Arab countries is relatively high. Parliamentary and political party structures often exclude young men and women from holding office. Moving forward, ESCWA will advance the importance of establishing clear mechanisms and structures for the engagement of young people in the decision-making process. As the world negotiates a post-2015 development agenda and a new set of SDGs, we will ensure that the regional message to global negotiations articulates a clear provision for the participation of youth in setting, implementing and monitoring the new development agenda. We will also ensure that regional negotiations on new goals take an integrated approach to youth issues in parallel to the one that we promote at the national level.

ESCWA

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