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Position of the Reflection Group of the Arab Region Towards The International Initiative of Measuring and Fostering Progress

With the aim of identifying and integrating the requirement of the Arab countries in the global initiative on measuring progress, the participants in the Third Arab Statistical forum held in Yemen 2007 decided to accept the invitation conveyed by the OECD to attend and actively participate in the second OECD world forum on statistics, knowledge and policy for measuring and fostering progress in societies in Istanbul 27-30 June 2007.

The organizers of the second world forum invited Mr. Shabanah, the chairman of the organizing committee of Yemen conference to chair the Middle East informal reflection group to respond to the discussions and deliberations of Istanbul Forum. The organizing committee called for a panel expert meeting to identify the requirements of the Arab region, and a position paper was prepared with support from UN-ESCWA and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS). This paper was submitted and refined during two meetings of the reflection group in Istanbul among twenty-six representatives from twelve Arab countries as well as regional and international institutions. While the participants welcomed the paper and called for further reflection on it, They agreed on the following set of principles:

Measuring Progress

The reflection group welcomes the OECD's global initiative for measuring and fostering progress in societies. It confirms that multidimensional-based indicators are more appropriate to measure progress and make relevant comparisons across countries with different development stages. Qualitative and quantitative indicators should be used to measure progress. Localizing the international indicators is quite important because they hide critical national dimensions touching the identity and the culture of regions. Indicators should reflect the real needs of regions, and therefore international list of indicators should be a minimal.

Core issues

Five core issues need to be addressed in the Arab region. This includes political situation, high economic variation across countries, social variation, environment and natural resources, and human rights-democracy and governance modalities.

Scope of work

1. Developing a regional button-up minimal set of indicators for measuring progress in the Arab region. The MDGs is envisaged as a sound starting point to develop this list, which should take into account the specificities of the region.
2. Developing a road map to involve decision makers, engage civil society as well as media and society at large in the statistical work.
3. Assessment of data availability and survey quality (ADP) and develop techniques to collect data in the framework of measuring progress indicators.
4. Highlighting the capacity building needs for the region; and design and implement a technical assistance program including training for statisticians, users, decision makers and journalists.

5. Setup a system to monitor and report about progress in the Arab region, and establishing a central repository information system as a tool to report and monitor progress in the Arab region. LAS and UNESCWA are requested to take the lead in this matter.
6. Advocacy campaigns and awareness-raising efforts to ensure wider participation at the grass root level.

Partners, counterparts and stakeholders

The statistical work should be cooperative across different players including: Public sector, Private sector, and Civil society. At the regional level, UN agencies and other regional commissions and international organizations involved in measuring progress and capacity building should be identified as partners of the initiative at the Arab region. This includes Arab League, UN-ESCWA, AITRS, GOIC, etc. Other international initiative have some activities related to measuring progress should be also involved (such as MEDSTAT, PARIS21, METAGORA, etc). At the national level, statistical offices should take the leading role.

Cost Assessment

Measuring progress is focused on the measurement and understanding of progress rather than achieving specific targets, this measurement requires costing as well. This includes need assessment of the current statistical systems and availability of data sources and then technical assistance to learn more about methodologies in the region. A costing for specific targets is then needed if we decide to follow the approach of the MDGs in transferring the society from certain position to another.

Steps Forward

At the practical level, the organizing committee of the third statistical capacity forum in the Arab countries, which is composed of the LAS, UNESCWA, Jordan, Yemen, Oman and chaired by Palestine will act as an "Arab Steering Committee for Measuring Progress" at the regional level. Egypt and AITRS and will be added to this committee. The mandate of the committee is to make sure that the Arab region is fully integrated in the follow up activities of Istanbul Forum. The committee will call for a task force to work on finalizing the position paper and propose a list of indicators for the Arab region. A research activity is envisaged to take place in the Arab region to identify needs, modalities and concerns in regard to measuring progress, and a back-to-back meeting with the first Arab statisticians conference is envisaged to discuss and finalize the list of indicators in cooperation with policy makers, civil society and media representatives.

The reflection group request the LAS, UN-ESCWA and GOIC to help in mobilizing resources to finance these activities as a first practical step to follow up on Istanbul's forum, and requests the OECD, OIC, Arab and Islamic development Banks and funds, UNDP and the World Bank to help in mobilizing resources from the region and from the international community to set a long term technical and financial assistance for measuring progress in the Arab region.