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UN-ESCWA CIVIL SOCIETY ADVISORY GROUP

By

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Part I - The Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG)

A. Background

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Networks in the Arab region are fast emerging as crucial actors in the development process. Their role is increasingly crucial in influencing policy making, as well as monitoring and implementing development projects.

They often are at the forefront of advancing a participatory approach to decision-making at the national and the regional level, and have vast potential to promote a rights-based approach to development in the region.

Based on the recommendations of the panel of the eminent persons on UN Civil Society Relations, and the previous Regional Coordination Meeting in November 2009, UN ESCWA committed to establishing the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG).

B. Objectives

The group would aim to:

- Create a forum allowing civil society in the region to voice opinions on the political processes of the UN
- Contribute to the empowerment of civil society by providing them with the needed resources and information and facilitating their engagement with the UN at the local, regional and international levels
- Foster linkages between regional networks and UN ESCWA's programmatic activities and strengthen dialogue
- Set in place a process of engagement with the aim of further developing localized mechanisms for a two-way flow of information, resources, and coordination between the UN and civil society in the region

The CSAG will convene representatives of regional civil society networks to provide critical as well as strategic input into UN discussions related to policy analysis or priority setting at a regional level. Such input will be taken in an advisory capacity by ESCWA to inform internal UN debate as well as engagement with member states.

In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives CSAG will:

- Create a forum for debate, dialogue, analysis and research concerning strategic, programmatic and operational priorities of UN development work in the region
- Act as a think-tank to shed light on emerging or chronic issues in development at the regional level
- Provide advice to the UN ESCWA on programmatic or strategic approaches upon request
- Elaborate a regional civil society input into critical regional or global events that affect policy direction in the region
- Identify national Networks of CSOs for partnership with UN ESCWA's national efforts

The suggested activities that CSAG will accomplish are the following:

- Participation in key regional meetings convened by ESCWA—ex. Regional Coordination Mechanism meetings
- Convening ad-hoc meetings, actual or virtual, around an issue or a priority—ex. Youth
- Shadow attendance of key UN ESCWA meetings that set or rethink strategic and programmatic priorities—ex. Social Committee meetings

- Review of key documents related to strategic or programmatic priorities—ex. ESCWA Strategic Framework; Arab MDGs Report
- Elaboration of position papers or statements as input into regional or global events that affect policy direction in the region—ex. Arab Economic and Social Summit; MDGs Summit
- Participation in ESCWA's annual Think Tank Meetings

However, and in order to accomplish all the above listed activities properly, the UN ESCWA, in order to facilitate the work of the CSAG, is committed to assure the following tasks:

- Provide adequate access to UN key strategic or programmatic documents
- Ensure adequate participation of CSAG in selected meetings or events
- Transfer global knowledge or training and capacity building material to the regional level to enable better civil society engagement with UN political processes
- Allocate a space for the CSAG's views in the review of regional or global priorities and at key regional and global events

C. Membership

It is worth noting that CSOs in the region face tremendous challenges related to their right to associate as independent entities and are often co-opted as paragonovernmental groups. Thus, it is important to make an appropriate selection of CSAG members that are able to accomplish the above mentioned objectives and activities in a representative and independent manner. To do so, there is a need to adopt criteria to define the most relevant CSOs to be members of such a group.

Initially, members will be selected from regional networks according to the following criteria:

- Networks and Organization with an ECOSOC Consultative status or eligible for ECOSOC consultative status accreditation
- Networks and Organizations active for at least three years prior to selection
- Networks and organizations representing a broad and balanced geographic coverage across the Arab region, including the Maghreb sub-region, the Gulf sub-region and Least Developed Countries
- Networks and organizations ensuring a broad and balanced representation of groups and issues—ex. Women and youth
- Networks and organizations ensuring a broad representation of different capacities and modalities of civil society work—ex. NGOs; Trade Unions; Advocacy Groups; Think Tanks

Membership to CSAG is for four years with a rotation every two years for half of the members (for the first group, half of the members will be drawn)

Part II - Challenges

Civil society organizations in the region are facing different types of challenges including political, cultural, economic, social and legal. However, their role developed through different periods and generations: from faith based and charitable associations to service providers to developmental agency. Most recently their advocacy role is becoming increasingly important tends to focus on human rights and citizenship in its approach.

The concentration of power and the centralization of the State in most Arab countries limit the space for civil society and prevent them from acting as agents for democratic change. The autocratic character of the State creates fear and restrictive measures, which leads CSOs to avoid playing any political role and limiting their activities to the civil and social dimensions.

Moreover, the states tend to restrict access to funders, whether local or international, thus limiting their independence and consequently, their effective role. In fact, under various pretexts, the State tends to control all sources of income and requires previous authorization to receive funding and in most cases, does not allow donations from foreign funders under the pretext of restricting collaboration with foreign interests.

Freedoms of assembly and association is violated and ignored in most countries. Legal frameworks restrict CSOs and prevent them from playing an effective role and building partnerships for development. Laws in most countries place CSOs under the direct control of the Ministry of Interior (or similar department) which applies a securitarian approach and undermines the very understanding of the role of CSOs.

Among CSOs, youth organizations are the most restricted because they aim by definition to protect the rights of an emerging and dynamic faction of society which can be perceived as a threat to power dynamics. Yet, the Arab region is considered to be among the youngest comparing to other regions. However, youth are facing lots of challenges particularly with regards to political participation, which is negatively affected by unfair electoral laws and restricted by curbed freedom of associations to name only a few factors.

Part III – On Youth and Poverty Reduction

A- Challenges

Poverty reduction is part of overall social, political, and economic structural change. It necessitates an active role by the state, taking into consideration the specific challenges faced by various societal groups.

To effectively address the interface between youth issues and poverty reduction, there is a need to put youth policies within the overall discussion of economic growth models and social protection in the Arab countries, and the region as a whole. For example, there is need to consider the shifts in the job markets and their impact on youth employment, and the relation of that to the shifts in the productive capacities and access of youth to social protection.

During the last decades, Arab economies witnessed economic growth that is detached from addressing poverty and unemployment. Although many Arab countries achieved economic growth between 5% to 8% (2003 to 2009), poverty remained averaged around 30% in Arab least developing countries, and 10% to 15% in middle income countries while according to official numbers unemployment averaged around 14% in 2007.

Within this context, youth, who represent 30% of the population, face major questions on the identity of the alternative development model that will help them address the social and economic challenges that they face. While they face increasingly restrictive political regimes, their role in poverty reduction cannot be isolated from their role in political reforms.

Political participation in general of youth people in particular is one of the important challenges in the region. This is due to the exclusive systems whether by imposing restrictions on the political life, freedom of expression and thought, or by adopting irrelevant electoral laws and restricting freedom of association.

Unemployment among youth has averaged around 20 to 30%, and increased to 45% in countries like Algeria and Iraq. It is characterized by long waiting periods and concentration among females. The restructuring of the labour markets as a result of trade liberalization and overall economic reforms have led to sectoral change in employment that is unevenly felt by women, youth and the highly educated. Moreover, continuous expansion of informal sector has increased the vulnerabilities on the social and poverty fronts (the informal sector represents 40 to 80% of non-agriculture employment in North Africa and 70% of new entrants in Egypt). Besides lack of jobs, the job market in the region suffers from lack of clear career paths and relevance of the created jobs to the expectations of young persons and cultural perceptions.

In regards to education, the quality of offered education still suffers ample shortcomings and disparities are wide between rural and urban regions and between public and private schooling. Good quality education does not represent a guarantee for employment. Within this context, the education system is contributing to reinforcing inequalities and not helping youth break the poverty circles in the region. Indeed, all the used indicators to measure the progress in education are quantitative while there is a lack of a qualitative assessment of the education sector.

Aligned with these challenges is a significant migration trend that focuses among the Arab countries towards Europe. These trends involve youth with higher education attainment and ones who already have jobs but are seeking better and more sustainable jobs with clear career paths (*450,000 highly-skilled workers from Arab countries reside and work outside the region*). These trends are also fuelled by other triggers such as lack of opportunities and unfulfilled aspirations due to regress on human development, participation and democratic practises, good governance, security, community trust, and technology. Despite that, **migration has still not been integrated in employment and labor market policies of Arab countries**

B- Youth Policies in the Region

When it comes to youth policies and programs, it can be noted that most Arab countries have either youth-focused institutions or youth-related policies. Several youth focused regional institutions and funds have been also established. The current model adopted by these institutions and some UN agencies perceives youth as a distinct socio-demographic group, and advocates for formulating a special youth policy, establishing a special governmental institution for them, and conducting special surveys of youth issues.

This holds the threat of having youth-targeted programs isolated from the overall policy frameworks in the region, thus leading to limited outcomes. For example, there would be limited added value in focusing youth oriented programs towards training on accessing the job markets while the labor markets themselves are not functioning.

Thus, effective interventions cannot be detached from the specific policy challenges the region faces. They need to come within the bigger framework of addressing policies' adequacy and synergies, and accordingly necessitate greater and more effective interaction between governments, the private sector and civil society organizations.

Indeed, effectively addressing the interface between youth issues and poverty reduction necessitates putting youth related interventions within the overall discussion of models of economic growth and social protection in the Arab countries, and the region as a whole. Stakeholders in this area ought to address the synergetic approach of tackling policies, institutional roles, and complementary programmatic interventions, and work with a longer term perspective of transformative interventions. They also need an understanding of the impact left by various institutions on incentive bases for policy and behavioural changes. Aligned with this framework, linkages ought to be achieved with the regional dimension, especially the regional economic and social dialogue, manifested through the Arab Economic and Social Summit.

Specific areas to be tackled within the circle of enhancing the role of youth in poverty reduction:

- Migration policies and rights of migrant workers as a policy area to be addressed within the circles of enhancing the role of youth in poverty reduction. It ought to be core to any social and economic cooperation among Arab countries and between them and third partners.
- Investment policies in the quality of education and curricula; this would extend beyond ad hoc programmatic interventions to address the core of the policy problematic at the interface of education systems, poverty reduction and redressing inequalities, and enhancing the role of youth.
- While advocating for shifts in the overall economic model towards adequate job generation, there is a need to address the social policy dimension which could reinforce re-distributive effects of economic

growth, enhance the productive capacities of individuals and groups, protect people from income loss and costs associated with unemployment, and overall enhance the abilities of youth to contribute to poverty reduction.

Part VI - Suggested members and budget

A. Eligible networks and regional organizations for CSAG membership

1	Arab NGO Network for Development	Ziad Abdel Samad	Lebanon	Social and Economic Rights
2	Issam Fares Institute	Rami Khoury	Lebanon	Public Policy/interaction of CSOs, officials and academics
3	Arab Network for Human Rights Information	Gamal Eid	Egypt	Human Rights
4	Arab Organization of Disabled People	Nawaf Kabbara	Lebanon	Rights and Disability; Lobbying
5	Arab Foundations Forum	Atala Kuttab	Palestine/Jordan	Building capacity and coordination of philanthropic work in the region
6	Arab Institute for Human Rights	El Tayeb Bakoush	Tunisia	Rights, including Human Rights education
7	Cawtar	Soukaina Bourawi	Tunisia	Women rights and media
8	Arab transparency Organization	Amer El Khayat	Lebanon	Anti Corruption and integrity
9	Arab Organization for Human rights	Mohsen Awad	Egypt	Human Rights
10	Carnegie Middle East Center	Paul Salem	Lebanon	Policy research
11	Arab Council for Social Sciences	Shabana Shahabuddin	Lebanon	Research on social development
12	GCC Associations of Economists			Economic development
13	GCC Associations of Sociologists		Bahrain	Social Development
14	Lebanese Center for Policy Study		Lebanon	Policy research
15	CRTDA	Lina Abi Habib	Lebanon	Women rights
16	AISHA: The Arab Women's Forum	Joumana Meri	Lebanon (rotational)	Gender Equality and Socio-economic participation of women

B. preliminary Budget for the first four years

A- Running cost of the CSAG (4 Years)

66.500 U\$D *4 years= 266.000 U\$D

B- Yearly event (workshop or seminar related to different selected topics)

73.250 U\$D *4 years= 293.000 U\$D

Total yearly budget 139.750 U\$D

Total budget for 4 years: 559.000 U\$D

Suggested yearly budget

Description	Unit price US\$	Units US \$	Total US \$	Remarks
Running cost				
Communication and dissemination of documents and information	1	12 months	12,000	P.S.: This budget includes only the cost of the yearly annual meeting and the running cost.
Printing, photocopying and mailing	2	12 months	24,000	
Secretarial work	1	12 months	12,000	
Total			48,000	
Annual meeting				
Travel (round trip air tickets to Beirut)	800	12 members	9,600.00	
Accommodation/Per Diem	150	12 members	5,400.00	2 days
Conference Facility	500		1,000.00	2 days
Facilitators/Rapporteurs/Support	500		1,000.00	2 days
Printing/Photocopying	500		500.00	
Cost/Communications				
Miscellaneous	1,000		1,000.00	
Total meeting			18,500	
Preliminary budget for the workshop				
Travel expenses	800	30	24,000	
Accommodation	150	30	18,000	4 days
Food and beverage	100	30	12,000	4 days
Stationary	25	30	750	
Consultation fees			1,000	2*3.000; 2*2.000
Translation			5,000	2 languages * 3days
Translation of documents			7,500	
Secretarial work	-----	-----	2,500	
Miscellaneous	2,500	-----	2,500	
Total			73,250	