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SOCIAL PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT SECTION

INFORMATION KIT

**EFFECTIVE INDICATORS TO MEASURE
PUBLIC CIVIC PARTICIPATION**



United Nations

WHY THIS INFORMATION KIT?

Civic participation was a key demand of Arab citizens who took to the streets demanding to be heard. Young and old, rich and poor, they came together as active citizens to express their right to have a say in the making of their own present and future. Arab citizens had struggled through decades of political suppression by authoritarian regimes that muffled various forms of civic engagement. Community engagement through charities or volunteerism has always been acceptable in the region, sometimes commended and encouraged by the state, but that is where the limits of engagement were set. Citizens who demanded genuine political freedoms were suppressed. They were also stripped of many of their inalienable rights.

Within the context outlined above, this information kit provides tangible measures of public civic participation (PCP) that have been tested to gauge engagement in different countries. It presents methods of assessing levels of participation and existing challenges, which may be tailored to enhance PCP in Arab countries.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC CIVIC PARTICIPATION

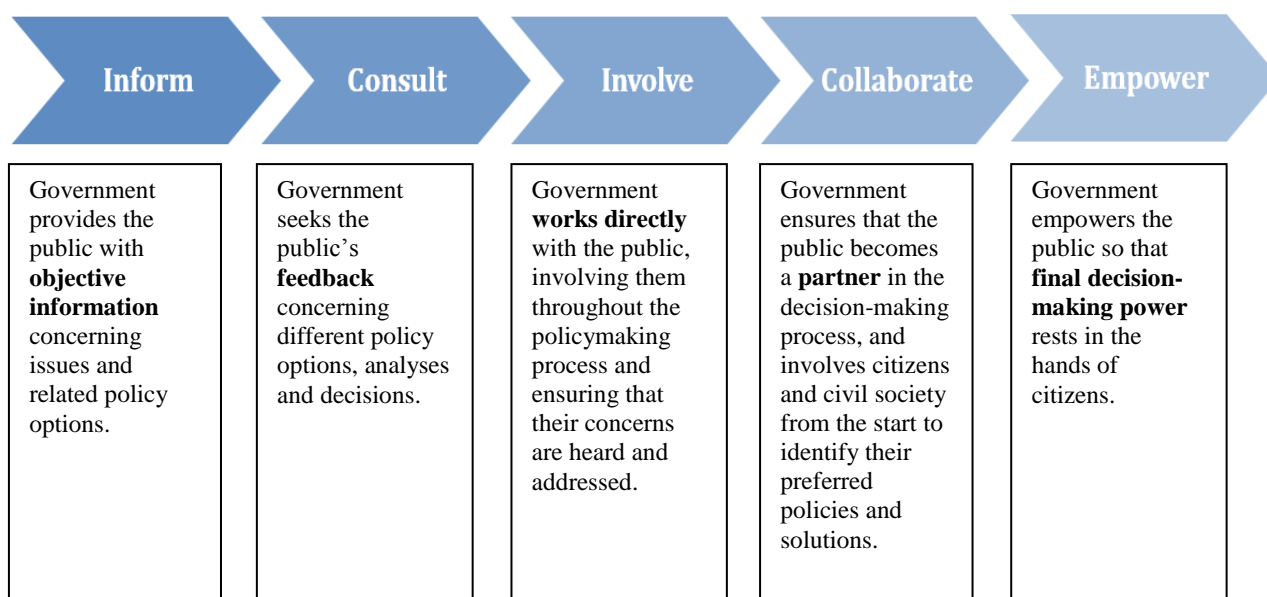
PCP refers to the involvement of citizens and communities in the various stages of the policymaking process. It moves beyond citizen volunteerism and community civic engagement and mainstreams citizen activism in the political sphere. PCP is an essential pillar of “engaged governance” which incorporates civil society – civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, religious communities, etc. – into the realm of policy planning.¹ Engaged governance paves the way for continued dialogue and discussion between multiple stakeholders, instead of restricting policymaking to decision-makers and governments. Participation is a key pillar and right of active citizenship. PCP integrates citizens into the governance process, both at the legislative and executive levels.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there are three levels of participation in public policymaking², determined according to the extent of citizen inclusion in the decision-making process, and the mutuality of the relationship between a government and its citizens. These three levels are:

1. *Information*: whereat this level, Governments convey information to citizens in a one-way relationship. Citizens are not involved in public policymaking and their relationship with Governments is passive and non-mutual.
2. *Consultation*: also known as ‘opportunistic participation’. At this level, Governments actively seek the views of citizens and civil society, but do not necessarily incorporate them into the policymaking process. It is an incomplete two-way relationship, with partial levels of mutuality and inclusiveness.
3. *Active participation*: this is the desired level of PCP, at which Governments actively seek collaboration with citizens on decision-making and engage with civil society in broad-based dialogue. Citizens thus take part in the design, planning and implementation of public policies. This level represents a true two-way relationship characterized by full inclusiveness and mutuality.

The following chart depicts a detailed model of PCP according to increasing levels of participation, moving from simply informing citizens and civil society about the policy process (lowest level of participation) to empowering them and placing final decision-making powers in their hands (highest level of engagement).

Figure I. Flow chart of PCP with an increasing level of participation



Source: International Association for Public Participation (2007). *IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation*. Available from http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf.

THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Participation in public policymaking is crucial because both citizens and Governments harvest the benefits of fruitful engagement. Table 1 depicts some of the key advantages of PCP for Governments and citizens.

In sum, PCP is important because: (1) it allows citizens and civil society to be actively engaged in the decision-making process; (2) it promotes policies tailored to the needs of society; (3) it enhances the political voice of citizens; (4) it promotes greater trust in Governments; (5) it increases the motivations of citizens and civil society, and their capacity to improve their societies, thus promoting greater social capital; (6) it increases the political self-efficacy of the public and establishes different channels for citizens to voice their concerns; in this way, (7) it decreases the propensity towards political violence; and (8) it is the building block for engaged citizenship which empowers citizens as active decision-makers rather than passive consumers of policies. The majority of these end results and benefits have been corroborated in a MercyCorps study published in 2012, which assessed the outcomes of PCP among various samples of Arab youth.

TABLE 1. BENEFITS OF PCP FOR GOVERNMENTS AND CITIZENS

Benefits for Governments	Benefits for citizens
Tapping into wider sources of information, perspectives and solutions	Making their opinions heard and gaining political voice and momentum
Developing policies of improved quality	Ensuring their expectations concerning public policies are met
Gaining more trust on behalf of the public	Developing more trust in their government and public institutions
Adequately responding to scrutiny, as their work is open to the public, thus achieving enhanced transparency and accountability	Moving from being passive recipients of policies and decisions into active decision-makers. This empowers civil society's key participatory functions.

Source: MercyCorps (2012). *Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes*. Available from http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena_youth_civic_engagement_study_-_final.pdf.

EFFECTIVE INDICATORS FOR MEASURING PCP

Civic participation in the public policymaking process is consistently gauged in the literature through three different sets of indicators:

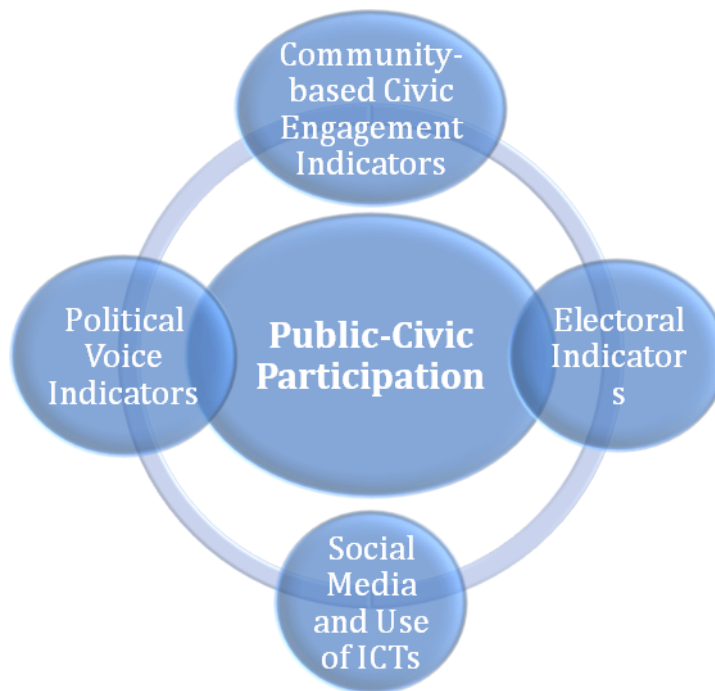
- *Community-based civic engagement indicators*
- *Electoral indicators*
- *Political voice indicators*

Recent participatory experiences have shown that more indicators are emerging to assess effective PCP, one of which is:

- *Social media and the use of information and communications technology (emerging indicator)*

The different levels and domains of PCP are not mutually exclusive. They are quite interrelated and the presence of one form of engagement is often positively correlated to other forms as well. For example, the likelihood of political engagement increases alongside the level of community engagement that citizens exhibit (through elections and political participation).³ Additionally, access to information and communications technology (ICT) and social media has been consistently linked to increased civic and political engagement across countries and cultures. The following diagram illustrates the cycle for citizen engagement, with the different indicators contributing to one another and creating, in sum, what is referred to as PCP.

Figure II. Different levels of indicators for public civic engagement



A. COMMUNITY-BASED INDICATORS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Community-based civic engagement refers to non-political and non-partisan associational activities that serve a certain social purpose. The following three core indicators measure community-based civic engagement:⁴

1. *Volunteering*: this entails community service on a regular basis for a non-political and non-electoral organization/association.
2. *Active membership in a group or association*: this entails either belonging to a certain group as an active member, or donating money to associations such as charities, labour unions, professional organizations or religious groups.
3. *Community-based problem solving*: this represents an informal and loose way of collectively associating with community members to solve a problem that impacts the community. This type of community engagement lacks the structure of belonging to a formal association or group, and the intent is to solve a specific, situational issue.

Box 1. Community-based engagement: Persons with disabilities in Lebanon

Disabled persons organizations (DPOs), often created and run by persons with disabilities (PwDs), have played an instrumental and vital role in advocating for the rights of PwDs in Lebanon over the past few decades. Their concerted efforts and persistent calls for the amelioration of the situation of PwDs culminated in the creation in 1993 of a National Committee for PwDs. It comprised multiple disability stakeholders in Lebanon, including organizations and individuals.

The committee was tasked by the Government with developing policies on disabilities and following up on their implementation in direct collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, civil society organizations, private service providers and other stakeholders. The Committee created the Rights and Access Program, providing PwDs with a disability card that provides them with access to public services. It also endorsed Law 220/2000, guaranteeing equal rights for PwDs.

The work of DPOs, starting at the community level and later engaging the wider public in policy planning and implementation, is evidence of how community-based organizations can participate in policymaking. Despite the fact that DPOs struggle with weak governance, their advocacy and achievements towards the goal of full rights for PwDs in Lebanon should be saluted.

Sources: <http://daleel-madani.org/story/realities-aid-targeting-persons-disabilities-pwds-lebanon> and <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001866/186600e.pdf>.

B. ELECTORAL INDICATORS

Electoral indicators represent the first group of civic political participation indicators. They refer to a range of activities that take place during election seasons and that determine how involved the public is in choosing policymakers, members of parliament, Governments and heads of state. According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI, 2012), political participation is central to transition towards democracy.⁵ Electoral participation is essential for the public to become the decision-maker on who rules, who represents the people and the extent of power these representatives have. The literature on PCP specifies several electoral indicators, including:

1. *Voting*: voting is assessed by both voter registration and voter turnout.⁶ Higher numbers of registered voters and greater actual turnout of voters on election days indicate elevated civic political engagement and political participation. Vote-to-registration ratio (meaning the proportion of actual voters to registered voters) is also important, especially in countries where registration is enforced, to determine what proportion of the population actually votes. Voting is considered to be the most traditional form of political action. The advantage of using voter turnout as an indicator of electoral participation is that figures are comparable across countries and regions.

2. *Campaign involvement*: this refers to attending political rallies, active involvement in campaigning for certain candidates and political parties and discussion of upcoming elections, formally or informally. These measurements indicate how involved citizens are in the political process, especially when it comes to elections, and how motivated they are to have a say in who gets to be in power.

TABLE 2. VOTER TURNOUT IN MOST RECENT ELECTIONS: HIGHLIGHTS FROM ARAB COUNTRIES

Country	Voter turnout
Bahrain	67.0 per cent
Egypt (2012)	<u>62.0 per cent</u>
Egypt (2010)	<u>27.5 per cent</u>
Iraq	64.0 per cent
Jordan	56.5 per cent
Kuwait	59.5 per cent
Lebanon	54.0 per cent
Libya (2012)	<u>61.6 per cent</u>
Morocco	45.4 per cent
Oman	62.7 per cent
Palestine	77.7 per cent
Syria	51.3 per cent
Tunisia (2009)	89.4 per cent
Yemen (2003)	75.0 per cent

Source for the most recent electoral indices: <http://www.idea.int/vt>.

- On average, there is a lower voter turnout rate in Arab countries as compared to Western Europe and North America.
- Egypt is a striking example of how the Arab uprisings drove an increase in civic engagement, with 62 per cent voter turnout in what was dubbed ‘Egypt’s first democratic election’. Up from 27.5 per cent in the prior election, this figure clearly indicates enhanced electoral participation.
- First parliamentary elections in post-Gaddafi Lybia witnessed a 61.6 per cent turnout rate.

C. POLITICAL VOICE INDICATORS

Political voice indicators are the second category under the wider concept of civic political participation. They refer to actions by citizens to meet certain political needs or demands in a non-electoral manner. The expression of political voice is an essential element of political participation, and an enabling factor in political transformation (BTI, 2012). It is also a key requirement of genuine and functional democracy,⁷ where citizens may raise their political voice, freely join political and civic groups, associate and assemble, and state their opinions and demands without fear of repercussions. In so doing, citizens communicate their needs and preferences, prompting public officials and policymakers to respond accordingly. Some of the indicators that measure the extent of political voice include:

1. *Protests, marches, and demonstrations*: These are considered ‘creative’ political voice indicators.⁸ Measurements include participation in, organization and endorsement of protests, marches and demonstrations. They involve people converging on a single cause, often demanding political or social change. It is a form of collective mobilization, often dubbed “the weapon of the weak” as it demands few resources beyond people’s commitment.⁹ Labor union and civil rights movements fall under this category.

2. *Boycotting*: this refers to refraining from buying a product or using a service due to the conditions under which they are made or the policies and social values supported by the source producing them.
3. *Petitioning*: this refers to signing petitions concerning a political or social issue. It can be done through online or written petitions.
4. *Contacting public officials*: this refers to contacting a range of officials, whether public employees, members of parliament, or ministers, about a political or social concern.
5. *Contacting the media*: this entails expressing political opinion, whether through print media (newspapers for example) or broadcast media (television, radio, etc.).

Box 2. Finding their voice: Citizens of Arab uprisings

Notwithstanding the future of Arab uprisings, the waves of mass demonstrations and public participation took the region by storm. For most citizens of Arab countries that had lived through decades of emergency rule, staging massive demonstrations as a means of political expression was a novelty. They discovered the power of their own voices as individuals and as a collectivity.

The Arab uprisings have created an opportunity for citizens to participate in public debates and express political and socioeconomic discontent in diverse ways. In addition to the indicators used, expressions of political voice across Arab countries that have witnessed popular uprisings also include music, graffiti, public debates, campaigns, petitions, community action and a range of other initiatives that are adopting creative approaches to collective action. While there are no indicators to assess their long-term impact, their messages have reached and in some instances galvanized large sectors of the population both domestically and abroad.

D. EMERGING INDICATORS: SOCIAL MEDIA AND USE OF ICTS

In the ever-changing world of technological advances, citizens have found new and non-traditional means and outlets for activism and participation. ICTs are highly pervasive, reaching people around the globe in a matter of seconds. The rise of social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter has provided almost instantaneous means of connectivity between far flung individuals wanting to weigh in on diverse social and political issues. A new, virtual platform has been created and has already helped enhance PCP and engagement among different groups. Online public civic engagement has been assessed in several ways.¹⁰ These include:

1. *Political engagement on social networking sites*: this refers to a range of activities on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, including: (a) promoting social and political issues; (b) posting personal opinions and commentaries; (c) joining and promoting political groups; (d) following websites and accounts of political leaders, public officials and candidates for election; (e) organizing protests, marches, and political events, including recruitment through social media platforms.
2. *Political engagement on other online platforms*: the same goals can be achieved through online activism on other platforms, such as blogs and forums. Blogging is currently very popular, as it provides a platform for free expression, documentation of current affairs and opinion pieces that can further engage users. Equally popular are forums where responses are categorized by topic, allowing an exchange of opinions and an expansion of political discussions. Youtube is also an ICT channel that has elevated participation to new levels, as events and opinions are reported in real time and can be freely accessed by users across the globe, in addition to activism and dissemination of knowledge through mobile phones.

TOWARDS GREATER PCP IN THE ARAB REGION

The Arab uprisings are a compelling testimony to citizens' desire to participate in the policymaking process. People were dissatisfied with forced acquiescence to government policy decisions that impacted negatively on their daily lives and livelihoods. With these uprisings came the realization that active participation and engaged citizenship are key steps on the road to democratic transition in the Arab region.

Box 3. The Arab world, social media and the Arab uprisings

Social media were in heavy use throughout the Arab uprisings, which earned the protests the title 'Twitter Revolution'. Although the term is highly debatable and perceived by some as exaggeration, one cannot deny that social media platforms played a substantial role in the social movements that began in January 2011.

The second Arab Social Media Report (May 2011) consistently showed that Facebook calls for protests were responded to with actual protests. A spotlight on Tunisia and Egypt showed that Facebook users utilized the site mostly to promote political movements and demonstrations and to join with other activists to seek support for the revolutions (over 80 per cent). A very small percentage of individuals used the site for other purposes, such as entertainment, gaming and connecting with friends (less than 15 per cent of users). Twitter usage increased dramatically during the uprisings, with tweets peaking in preparation for protests, during demonstrations and in response to major political developments. Consequently, the hashtags #egypt, #jan25, #libya, #bahrain, and #protest were trending highly in the first quarter of 2011.

Source: <http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/UserManagement/PDF/ASMR%20Report%202.pdf>.

Many surveys and measures are already in use worldwide to gauge PCP, given the benefits they offer both citizens and Governments. An initial step for improving PCP is to measure the level of participation followed by the aspects of engagement that need improvement.

Therefore, and in light of the Arab region's recent experiences of non-institutionalized PCP, the following actions are proposed:

- Create measures, based on international indicators, to comprehensively assess the levels of engagement of Arab citizens in the public sphere and the decision-making process;
- Assess the influence that participation has had on the political process, democratization and enhanced governance;
- Evaluate the gaps in participation, and specify whether they exist in the domains of community-based civic engagement, electoral participation, political voice, or online engagement;
- Create a comprehensive plan to enhance citizen participation, based on the wide-ranging gap assessment.

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2007). *Civic Engagement in Public Policies: A Toolkit*. ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E/106.

² Ibid.

³ Keeter, S., Jenkins, K., Zukin, C., and Andolina, M. (2003). Three Core Measures of Community-Based Civic Engagement: Evidence from the Youth Civic Engagement Indicators Project. *Search Institute Series*. Available from http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2003_03_12_PD_PDConfKJZA.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung (2012). *BTI (Bertelsmann Transformation Index) Project*. Available from <http://www.bti-project.org/home/index.nc>.

⁶ The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2013). *OECD Better Life Index: Civic Engagement*. Available from <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/civic-engagement/>.

⁷ Scholzman, K. L., Verba, S., & Brady, H. E. (2012). Introduction: Democracy and Political Voice. In *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Scholzman, K. L., Page, B. I., Verba, S., & Fiorina, M. (2004). Inequalities of Political Voice. *Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, American Political Science Association*. Available from <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/voicememo.pdf>.

¹⁰ Smith, A. (2013, April). Civic Engagement in the Digital Age. *Pew Research Center*. Available from http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2013/PIP_CivicEngagementintheDigitalAge.pdf.