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Item 13 (b) of the provisional agenda



**Follow-up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development in the Arab region**

Outcomes of the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is submitting to the Executive Committee the report of the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development in the form adopted by the Forum at its sixth session, held in Beirut from 9 to 11 April 2019, on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Arab region”, and as presented to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2019, on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. The Arab Forum constitutes a high-level regional platform to review and follow up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region. The report contains key messages that will be submitted to the High-level Political Forum.

ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other United Nations entities working in the Arab region, organized the Arab Forum. Its agenda included plenary sessions on the main theme, means of implementation at the regional level and national experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda, in addition to special sessions focusing on priority issues for the Arab region, such as inclusion, empowerment and equality as pathways to peace and development; advancing climate action in the Arab region; ensuring sustainable and at-scale engagement of adolescents and youth in the Arab region; the future of work and its impact on gender equality; advancing social justice and social cohesion through inclusive social protection in conflict-affected States; and strengthened partnerships to support coherence of national policies and strategies for disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.

The Executive Committee is invited to take note of the outcomes of the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development.



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**Note by the Secretariat transmitting the reports of the regional
forums on sustainable development**

**Report of the 2019 Arab Forum for
Sustainable Development**

2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Arab region

Held at United Nations House, Beirut, 9–11 April 2019



Introduction

1. The 2019 session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Arab region”, was held in Beirut from 9 to 11 April by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in conjunction with the League of Arab States and United Nations bodies working in the Arab region, and was chaired by Iraq.

2. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development is a high-level regional platform for reviewing and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The five previous sessions of the Forum were held in Amman in 2014 and 2016, Manama in 2015, Rabat in 2017 and Beirut in 2018. The Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, issued at the twenty-ninth session of ESCWA (held in Doha from 13 to 15 December 2016), enshrines the Forum as an annual meeting of Governments of the Arab States and sustainable development stakeholders for sharing experiences and studying mechanisms to implement the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.¹ Its conclusions are submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which is held annually in New York in July.

3. The Forum was preceded by a series of regional meetings held between its 2018 and current sessions: (1) the international Conference on Financing Sustainable Development: Curbing Illicit Financial Flows, held in November 2018; (2) the Youth Forum in the Arab Region, held in December 2018; (3) the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held in January 2019; (4) the Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum, held in January 2019; (5) the Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held in March 2019; (6) the Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum, held in March 2019; and (7) the regional Civil Society Organizations Forum prior to the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, held in April 2019.

4. Seven plenary sessions of the Forum were dedicated to the central theme of “empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Arab region”, the means of implementing the 2030 Agenda at the regional level and national experiences in terms of implementation, follow-up and review. Nine special sessions focusing on priority issues for the Arab region and a round-table discussion on voluntary national reviews were also held.

5. Participants in the Forum discussed several key messages for submission to the high-level political forum, which will be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2019 on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. The conclusions of the Forum will also be presented at the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee of ESCWA, which is due to be held in June 2019. The messages were formulated with an Arab perspective in mind in order to contribute to an understanding of the region’s priorities with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals under review at the 2019 high-level political forum.

¹ The Forum’s terms of reference derive from a series of ESCWA resolutions, including resolution 327 (XXIX) on the working mechanisms of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, adopted at the twenty-ninth session of the Commission, resolution 314 (XXVIII) on the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, adopted at its twenty-eighth session (Tunis, 15–18 September 2014) and Executive Committee resolution 322 on a strategy and plan of action on the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, adopted by the Committee at its second meeting (Amman, 14–16 December 2015).

I. Key messages from the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

A. Key messages on the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region

General messages

1. The year 2019 will be pivotal for the follow-up and review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. All countries in the region should seize the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to implement the Agenda and accelerate progress by critically reviewing development processes, taking the appropriate initiatives and encouraging the international community to fulfil its commitments.

2. The Arab Forum is growing in stature as a broad, regional stage for all parties to engage in the annual follow-up and review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It also serves to promote a common regional approach to and solidarity on cross-border issues and challenges facing all the Arab countries. The Forum plays an important role in the exchange of experiences, the dissemination of knowledge and the reaffirmation of commitments to sustainable development at the regional and international levels.

3. Four years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, progress made in the Arab region and around the world leaves much to be desired. Levels of poverty, hunger and inequality are rising, conflicts and war are spreading, climate change is threatening the planet's very sustainability and growth rates are slowing. The prevailing consumerist model is devastating the environment and political polarization around the globe is undermining capacity for collective action.

4. In spite of the efforts and advances made by the Arab countries across a broad range of development issues, in particular with regard to health and education, progress as measured in terms of the indicators for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals has clearly been insufficient. It would appear that none of the Arab countries will manage to implement the Goals by 2030.

5. The considerable challenges, some of them chronic and deeply rooted, confronting the countries and peoples of the region are holding back progress. Among the most critical are: increasing poverty; the lack of sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth; the proliferation of conflicts, which is crippling the potential for economic and social growth; high unemployment, in particular among young persons; the yawning gaps in developmental equality between regions and social groups; and the lack of gender equality. There is a need for institutions able to meet the needs of all social groups and regions. Cross-sectoral policy coordination is poor and there is a need to engage all the various stakeholders, including civil society, young persons and the private sector. Further challenges are posed by climate change and the scarcity of natural resources, such as water.

6. Occupation and conflict have taken a heavy toll on the region's peoples, institutions, natural resources, infrastructure and peace, and on progress towards sustainable development in general. Not only have they circumscribed the region's capacity to regenerate with a programme of transformational development, they have also led to a steep and ongoing reversal of basic development gains, such as those relating to health, education and the empowerment of women and girls.

7. It is essential that the Arab countries and the international and regional institutions operating in the region work to close the large data gap, in particular with regard to the collection of disaggregated data, not only to monitor progress but also

to calibrate policies and programmes and bring the Arab countries closer to achieving the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

8. Effective institutions, constitutions and legal reform at the national level remain the key to achieving sustainable development, equality and justice, and to aligning national development plans with the 2030 Agenda.

Voluntary national reviews

9. The Arab Forum comes at a propitious moment, creating a space for dialogue and providing countries that are preparing their voluntary national review reports for the high-level political forum with a chance to submit them for peer review, including through discussion of the challenges faced by countries that have submitted voluntary national reviews in the past.

10. The voluntary national reviews have helped to bring about a positive change in the understanding of development planning, facilitating the establishment of mechanisms for inter-institutional coordination and providing a catalyst to review how national budgets are prepared in some Arab countries.

11. After three rounds of voluntary national reviews, issues surrounding partnerships and the lack of an inclusive approach for all stakeholders continue to be the weakest link. Consultations are often kept to a bare minimum, whereas there ought to be a participatory framework involving civil society, the private sector, parliaments and universities. Such a framework would ensure an active role for local communities in addressing national issues through the prism of the 2030 Agenda.

12. The first round of voluntary national reviews helped to shed light on realities on the ground, monitor priorities, launch national dialogues on the alignment of national guidelines with the Sustainable Development Goals, and identify data gaps. The second round contributed, in those countries that took part in the exercise, to the monitoring of progress and activation of partnerships with civil society, the private sector and other actors. It served as a tool for addressing development challenges at the national level.

13. Voluntary national reviews are an ongoing process that does not end with the submission of reports to the high-level political forum. The post-review stage remains beset by shortcomings, especially in terms of establishing mechanisms for making review results public, publishing reports and implementing the recommendations contained therein.

14. The challenges facing statistical bodies, as well as data gaps and a lack of capacity and resources, should not prevent countries from fulfilling their obligations to their peoples and the principle of leaving no one behind.

Means of implementation

A. Financing

15. The clear disparity between developing and developed countries in the Arab region in terms of access to markets, finance and technology needs to be bridged. That requires greater engagement by all Arab countries in international processes and negotiations and increased investment and intraregional trade.

16. Economic diversification, the redistribution of wealth and financing targeted at the needs of different social groups and regions can help to bridge the financing gap in the region's countries and promote equality and inclusive growth.

17. The countries of the region stand to benefit from funding for more effective climate change resistance initiatives and, at the same time, harmonization of the 2030

Agenda with the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. That will require overarching policy reform across the region, closer coordination between and deeper integration of the environmental, social and economic sectors and the design of projects to foster the conditions necessary for the region's countries to tap new sources of finance.

B. Technology

18. The Arab countries must embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution and harness new technological advances, such as the Internet of things, artificial intelligence, robotics, smart cities and other innovative solutions to drive sustainable development.

19. They need to invest in technology literacy in all its forms and raise the quality of education as a primary tool for enabling people to live with dignity.

20. Technology in all its diverse manifestations provides tools to empower women, persons with disabilities and young persons and to facilitate their access to the labour market. It also opens the way to tearing down geographical barriers and overcoming cultural constraints and thereby fostering connectivity, the exchange of knowledge and access to information. Aside from being a tool to assist such people in their daily lives and help them to generate personal income, it also has a role to play in channelling innovation and talent into profitable projects and applications.

C. Partnerships

21. More thought should be given to developing, institutionalizing and spreading a culture and awareness of innovative, participatory and transparent models of open government, open data and participatory budgeting, with a view to curbing corruption, addressing the lack of budget transparency, reining in exorbitant defence spending, strengthening oversight institutions and increasing their independence.

22. Enhancing the role and input of civil society requires a favourable environment, a legal and institutional framework based on the principles of good governance and transparency and the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure objective evaluation and effective partnership in implementation, follow-up and monitoring.

23. There is a need to involve parliaments in the preparation of plans, strategies and budgets that truly reflect national development priorities and to enhance their legislative and regulatory functions in that regard.

24. Mechanisms for building partnerships with the private sector need to be put in place based on a clear understanding of corporate social responsibility. Support is needed for monitoring and accountability mechanisms so that the private sector, too, might contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

D. Data

25. The bulk of data available in the Arab countries, regardless of the methodologies used to compile them and contrary to what is specified in the 2030 Agenda, are not disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location or other characteristics. More must be done to verify data and ensure that they are accurate, up to date and responsive to different variables across the region.

26. Statistical bodies in conflict-affected States require particular attention and capacity-building given the destruction of documentation and the means of gathering information.

27. Measuring governance indicators to monitor progress in achieving Goal 16 will require independent and transparent institutions and mechanisms.

B. Key messages on the theme of the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development: Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Arab region

28. Equality is a basic human right and cornerstone of development. The cost of building greater equality is far lower than the price of inequality, which gives rise to discrimination and violence, destroys social relations, creates instability and hinders development. It is therefore vital to allocate sufficient budget funding to achieving equality.

29. To achieve equality, comprehensive, cross-sectoral policies that address the drivers of inequality and its consequences are needed. The various governmental and non-governmental actors must partner and coordinate with one another. It is equally important to invest in and popularize a culture of equality, in particular among the younger generation, in order to bring about the cultural and structural change that will guarantee human rights.

30. Equality is by its nature cross-sectoral, and thus its scope cannot be defined solely in the terms set forth under Goal 10. A quantitative assessment of inequality must be based on a scientific understanding of its multiple dimensions, such as deprivation, marginalization, exclusion and discrimination at the economic, political, social, environmental and intellectual levels. There is thus an urgent need for new composite measures that take into account how these dimensions and levels intersect.

31. Differences and inequalities between regions and social groups can be mitigated by incorporating decentralization into development policy. This would also serve to buttress inclusiveness through consultation and coordination and by shifting the centre of decision-making to local communities.

32. The principle of leaving no one behind also requires policies to promote equality for the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, regardless of their number. Inequality between the regions of any given country is one of the most salient aspects of inequality in the Arab region.

33. Inequality is a cross-sectoral issue that is not confined to matters of social protection. Tackling it will require a rights-based approach encompassing the gamut of human rights. Schooling for children under the age of 5 years should thus be incorporated into systems of free and compulsory education, and inter-State and intra-State discrepancies in health care costs should be reduced.

34. There is a correlation between inequality within countries of the region and inequality among countries of the world. That is due in part to structural shortcomings in international trade agreements that exacerbate inequality within and between countries. The resulting polarization warps global governance systems, in particular trade regimes that affect agriculture, manufacturing and the environment.

35. The consensus that inclusiveness is essentially an ethical, political and developmental principle rests on the idea of accepting diversity and pluralism. Inclusiveness is made possible by participation and as a result becomes a means of addressing inequality.

36. It is commonly agreed that poverty eradication strategies should seek primarily to alleviate all aspects of poverty and thereby help to achieve social justice and bring about a radical and qualitative shift transforming the poor into a productive component of society. The measurement of poverty should thus evolve constantly to reflect its causal factors rather than its symptoms.

37. The participation of persons with disabilities ought to be encouraged. Their needs and activities should be woven into national development plans and health,

education and employment policies, guided by a rights and social perspective and taking into account the Washington Group question sets as a measure for developing and implementing sound strategies for such persons.

38. Young women are most vulnerable to poverty, illiteracy, early marriage and exclusion from social, economic and political life owing to a patriarchal cultural heritage and other structural challenges that thwart their empowerment and hold them back from playing a fully active part in society.

39. If the region's countries are to benefit from the demographic dividend, their Governments must adopt a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach that is responsive to the needs of young persons in different regions, involves them in decision-making processes, boosts their level of education, helps them to obtain employment, reduces the brain drain, raises their awareness and civic culture, and steers them clear of extremist and terrorist tendencies.

Inclusiveness, empowerment and equality as pathways to peace and development

40. There is a need to adopt the transformational vision called for in the 2030 Agenda and the principles of inclusiveness, empowerment and equality in the work of institutions and at all levels, local and central, especially in countries affected by conflict or occupation, so as to enhance their resilience and capacity to provide the basic components of development.

41. The Israeli occupation authorities bear the prime responsibility for holding back development in the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular through restrictions that hamper development financing and the blossoming of a productive economy to underpin sustainable development.

42. National dialogue and efforts to achieve peace must go hand in hand with the protection of institutions, on the one hand, and economic recovery on the other, in order to halt the decline in development besetting conflict-affected countries and ensure that the basic foundations are laid for a return to development.

43. By generating knowledge through science and technology, exchanging information and data and stimulating the economy with mutually beneficial projects, the groundwork can be laid for settling conflicts between Arab countries and between them and their neighbours. In other words, science diplomacy can be deployed in the service of sustainable development.

Advancing social justice and cohesion in conflict-affected countries through comprehensive social protection

44. There is a need to develop and strengthen the preparedness of governmental institutions to cope with emergency situations, in particular those that fuel poverty, and thus to ensure robust responses that translate into inclusive social protection initiatives and programmes.

45. It is important that social protection programmes cover refugees and the displaced. Action should also be taken to address obstacles that prevent them from entering the labour market and discourage them from returning home even when what prompted them to flee is no longer an issue.

46. The private sector should be seen as an actor and partner in the process of reforming social protection systems and their funding methods, particularly in areas affected by conflict and war.

47. United Nations organizations and programmes should continue to support countries hosting refugees and displaced persons and help them to build capacity to provide social protection for their own nationals and newcomers.

Ensuring the broad and sustainable participation of adolescents and young persons in the Arab region

48. Young persons should be involved in decision-making at the local, national and regional levels. To that end, Governments should act swiftly to provide effective and sustainable channels to ensure their participation in implementing all the Sustainable Development Goals and following up recommendations.

49. Young persons deserve praise for their creative initiatives in a variety of areas that contribute to public life. The United Nations and League of Arab States should support the holding of youth forums along the lines of the Youth Forum in the Arab Region in order to intensify dialogue among young persons and strengthen their confidence in their institutions and States.

50. Individual States and the international community must not neglect the right of marginalized young persons, in particular those with disabilities, the displaced and refugees, to take part in development. They have a solemn duty to protect such young persons from discrimination and exclusion and to prioritize the empowerment of girls and young women.

Regional Consultation on the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

51. Volunteerism can be a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It requires the effective participation of all stakeholders, including civil society, the integration of volunteerism into national development plans, the elaboration of legislation and innovative policies to boost national capacities and mobilize volunteers in order to maintain social peace.

52. A favourable environment is required to channel young persons' energy and inventiveness and provide opportunities for volunteerism, bearing in mind the need to build their skills and enhance their employability.

53. Arab countries should engage in dialogue and share experiences regarding volunteerism. They should conduct consultations regarding the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda in the run-up to the global technical meeting in 2020.

Leaving no one behind: gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusiveness

54. All women, including those with disabilities, must be represented and participate in policymaking in order to build inclusive and equal societies in which everyone, regardless of gender or social or health status, may be empowered.

55. The collection of data on women and girls, including those with disabilities, must be improved in order to obtain a clearer picture of the intersecting forms of inequality and the social obstacles that women face, and to include them in the policymaking process.

The future of work and its impact on gender equality

56. Given the transformations that are bound to occur in the world of work in the coming years, achieving Goal 8 will depend largely on the readiness of employees, employers and Governments to keep pace with the change that the region will see and reap the benefits of opportunities arising from technology, mechanization, economic integration and climate action.

57. It is important for Governments to invest in and support the care economy, thereby facilitating women's access to the labour market, creating job opportunities and underpinning economic growth.

58. Men and women working in the care economy are entitled to the same rights and decent working conditions as other workers, including the rights to organize, collective bargaining, decent working hours and safe working conditions.

Advancing climate action in the Arab region in support of the development process

59. Climate change is exacerbating development challenges in the Arab region, such as conflict, occupation and inequality, and making them harder to resolve. Climate action is therefore a priority for the region and can bolster efforts to reduce the risk of disasters and achieve sustainable development.

60. Enhancing cross-sectoral policy integration and regional coordination between countries is key to translating climate commitments into action on the ground.

61. Adaptation measures are needed in order to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities. They should be followed up comprehensively; local communities and women should be involved in decision-making processes.

Strengthening partnerships to enhance coherence of national policies on and strategies for disaster risk reduction and sustainable development

62. Stakeholder groups, including regional disaster risk reduction associations, should work hand in hand with Governments to develop national strategies and policies, taking into account the nexus between disaster risk reduction, climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals.

63. Science and policy should be more closely aligned. Partnerships should be promoted through a clear regional mechanism that takes into account challenges and opportunities and fosters a culture of shared responsibility and sustained engagement to achieve the aims of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

II. Sessions and presentations

6. In addition to the opening and closing sessions, the Forum consisted of plenary sessions on its main theme, "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Arab region", and on the voluntary national reviews. The plenary session topics were as follows:

Session I	Setting the scene: towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region
Session II	Equality: policies and opportunities
Session III	Inclusion: policies and opportunities
Session IV	Empowerment: policies and opportunities
Round table discussion	Lessons learned from the voluntary national reviews

Session V	Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality for sustainable development: harnessing the means of implementation
Session VI	Preparatory regional consultations for sustainable development: outcome messages for the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the high-level political forum
Session VII	The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development in a regional and global context

7. The Forum also featured nine special sessions on priority issues for the Arab region: (I) Inclusion, empowerment and equality as pathways to peace and development; (II) Advancing climate action in the Arab region; (III) Ensuring sustainable and at-scale engagement of adolescents and youth in the Arab region; (IV) The future of work and its impact on gender equality; (V) The Regional Consultation on the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda in the ESCWA region; (VI) Rethinking inequality in Arab countries; (VII) Advancing social justice and social cohesion through inclusive social protection in conflict-affected States; (VIII) Strengthening partnerships to support coherence of national policies on and strategies for disaster risk reduction and sustainable development; (IX) Gender equality, the empowerment of women and inclusiveness.

A. Opening session

8. Speakers at the opening session included Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Noori al-Dulaimi, Minister of Planning, Iraq, in his capacity as Chair of the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development; Ahmad Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; and Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. They addressed the reality on the ground and challenges facing the Arab region, with a focus on sustainable development opportunities, what has been achieved thus far and the need to intensify efforts at a time when circumstances at the national, regional and international levels pose a threat to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

B. Plenary sessions

Session I. Setting the scene: towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region

9. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme, ESCWA, chaired the session, in which the following took part: Hala El Saeed, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt; Mohamed Abdul-Wahed al-Maitami, Minister of Industry and Trade, Yemen; Mohamad Mohsen El Sayyed, Director-General of the Department of Regional and Local Development, Ministry of Planning, Iraq; Limiaa Khalfallah, Secretary-General of the National Population Council, the Sudan; and Ahmad bin Hassan Al Hammadi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar.

10. The speakers sketched out an overview of development challenges and the strategies implemented to address them. They stressed the importance of data collection for establishing a true picture of the region's development indicators, identifying challenges and developing the most appropriate policies for overcoming them. They pointed out the collaborative efforts by Governments and the various stakeholders to draft and implement national sustainable development plans and strategies and their focus on least developed communities. The importance of making a concerted effort to localize the Sustainable Development Goals and follow up progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was stressed, as were the relationship between constitutional guarantees, legal reform and operational programmes for development, the importance of regional economic integration, the centrality of human rights in the development process and the need to establish a new Arab social contract.

11. Participants shed light on how conflicts hamstring development and the ways in which the lack of social peace makes it especially difficult to achieve sustainable. Discussion also turned to the achievements of certain countries and the challenges facing them, in particular with regard to the mobilization of funds for development, the decline of multilateralism, the erosion of partnerships, the return to protectionism and the adverse impact on development of the Israeli occupation.

Session II. Equality: policies and opportunities

12. Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj, Senior Coordinator at the Common Space Initiative, chaired the session, in which the following speakers took the floor: Adib Nehmeh, development expert, Lebanon; Monia Ammar, judge and counsellor on the Court of Cassation, Tunisia; Reem Abu Hassan, former Minister of Social Development, Jordan; and Ayman Sawalha, Adviser to the Minister of Social Development, Palestine.

13. Speakers discussed the issue of inequality at various levels, including between countries at the global level and, at the national level, between rural and urban areas, different age and social groups and the sexes. Starting from the principle of "leaving no one behind", the speakers highlighted the yawning gap between the normative framework concerning equality and its practical implementation and the need to embed the concepts of equality and rights in local culture and anchor them in law. The issue of poverty in the Arab region was also discussed in view of the growing accumulation of total wealth by the world's richest percentile, with the concomitant decline of the middle class and rising poverty. Speakers stressed the need to understand the structure of poverty and to translate national policies into programmes that can be carried out effectively, all the while paying close attention to changes in the approach to measuring indicators of multidimensional poverty. They focused on the need for an integrative approach to measuring inequality based on comparisons between community groups that benefit most from development and those that benefit least, using samples of as many such groups as possible. Equal opportunity and its impact on individual freedom were discussed, along with the role of civil society in making people's voices heard and identifying problems of inequality, and the need for Governments to be proactive in guaranteeing freedoms. Participants discussed challenges facing countries in the region and structural problems at the normative, legal, social and economic levels, including the fact that wealth was distributed through a rent-seeking approach instead of being invested in productive projects with added value for the economy. That problem would require an examination of structures and wealth distribution mechanisms. The drag effect of conflict and rising national debt on development was also aired. Tunisia and Jordan provided examples of how they promoted the principles of equality and how civil society campaigns had prompted their respective Governments to take legal steps to reduce inequality.

Session III. Inclusion: policies and opportunities

14. Hania Sholkamy, Associate Professor of the Social Research Center, American University in Cairo, chaired the session, in which the following took part: Najla Ali Murad, Director General of the Executive Directorate for Poverty Reduction Strategy, Ministry of Planning, Iraq; Abdulkhaleq Touhami, Professor at the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics, Morocco; Lotfi Ben Said, Director of the Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment, Tunisia; and Mohannad Al Azzeh, Secretary-General of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Jordan.

15. The speakers discussed the concept of inclusiveness and how to achieve it. Noting that the Arab region faced particular challenges with regard to the acceptance of diversity, especially in terms of representation, they emphasized that inequality was best tackled through inclusiveness. National plans and experiences relating to the achievement of economic inclusiveness and combating poverty were reviewed, and the particular need to address operational issues arising from initiatives to combat poverty and reduce inequality was stressed. Participants saw targeting, the means of implementation and governance as key challenges for such initiatives. Decentralization as a means of achieving inclusiveness, especially in marginalized areas, was also discussed. With regard to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, a large and marginalized group in Arab countries, participants underlined the need to eliminate stereotypes in policymaking. Discussion touched on impediments to inclusiveness in the region, such as policy shortcomings regarding the redistribution of the benefits of growth, little of which reached the poor in the absence of a rights-based approach to the distribution of the fruits of growth. However, concentrating only on the economic side of inclusiveness, without addressing the social and human rights aspects, was equally problematic. Inclusiveness was not only a matter of distribution; it required integration on an equal footing.

Session IV. Empowerment: policies and opportunities

16. Atidel Mejbri, Director of the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), Tunisia, chaired the session, in which the following took part: Abdullah Lamlas, Minister of Education, Yemen; Manar Zgheir, young learner, Yemen; Nabila Youssef, education facilitator and advocate, Egypt; and Foued Aouni, Director of the National Youth Observatory, Tunisia.

17. Participants focused on the concept of empowerment in the Arab region and emphasized that education, employment and participation were key components thereof. Speakers stressed the need to empower young persons in order to address the issues affecting them and respond to their needs, given that they accounted for a large proportion of the region's population and the largest in comparison with other regions. That population group was, however, plagued by widespread unemployment and poverty, had little communication with or trust in government officials and was bereft of appropriate guidance in the media. While young persons represented a potential demographic dividend, given their capacity to innovate and push for positive change in society, they faced political, social, economic and cultural hurdles, such as unemployment, a significant school dropout rate, regional disparities in terms of economic opportunities, a multiplicity of cultural models before them and the emergence of behavioural and social phenomena, such as irregular migration, which were fraught with danger.

18. In that context, participants reviewed national and local experiences in Egypt and Yemen, obstacles to educational continuity in countries embroiled in conflict, and the development priorities for overcoming those obstacles. The opportunities offered by technology to improve literacy, promote adult learning and reach marginalized

groups were also examined. Participants stressed the need to foster a culture of development among young persons, integrate them economically, socially and politically, and so bring out the best in them.

Round table discussion: Lessons learned from the voluntary national reviews

19. Adib Nehmeh, development expert, Lebanon, chaired the session, in the course of which presentations were made by Saras Jagwanth, Interregional Adviser in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, and Hania Sabbidin Dimassi, ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda. The session was also addressed by Tariq Al-Ansari, Director of the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar; Samaher Al Shelali, Ministry of the Economy and Planning, Saudi Arabia; Intissar Alwahaibi, Director of Development Planning in the Supreme Council for Planning, Oman; Ziad Obeidat, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Labour, Jordan; Ahmad Kamaly, Deputy Minister for Planning Affairs, Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt; Fadlala Garzaldeen, Deputy Head of the Planning and International Cooperation Commission, Syrian Arab Republic.

20. Participants agreed that the preparation of voluntary national reviews was inextricably linked to implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The aim of the reviews, beyond their mere preparation and presentation to the high-level political forum, should be to stimulate genuine and open debate on development opportunities and challenges at the country level. Discussion revolved around the phase following the submission of initial voluntary national reviews, best practices to emerge during and after the review process, with a focus on the experiences of various countries in that regard, and institutional guidelines in the region on how to conduct the reviews. Country representatives presented an overview of national experiences with regard to the preparation of voluntary reviews and the challenges that they had faced in that process. Participants also discussed the usefulness of the reviews in determining development priorities, planning for their implementation and dealing with shortcomings in development plans. They agreed that the accuracy, categorization and timeliness of data posed a challenge, and that it was important to build capacity for their collection and use. They also discussed challenges identified in national voluntary review reports, such as how to align national plans with the Sustainable Development Goals, determine development-specific budget allocations and deal with the impact of steady population growth on sustainable development efforts, as well as the consequences of war and conflict for development efforts.

Session V. Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality for sustainable development: harnessing the means of implementation

21. Maged Osman, CEO, Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research (Baseera), chaired the session, with the participation of Hamza Ould Bakar, information expert at the General Directorate for Local Government, Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization, Mauritania; Kinda Hattar, finance and anti-corruption expert, Jordan; and Qusai Al Shatti, strategic expert on the World Summit on the Information Society and the Internet Governance Forum, Kuwait.

22. Participants addressed localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, which, they noted, was critical to the principle of leaving no one behind, and focused on local-level governance. They were apprised of the experience of Mauritania, which had put in place mechanisms to involve local government and town councils in the follow-up and assessment of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They discussed the role of information and communications technology in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, challenges relating to its availability and the importance of transition to the digital economy, especially in terms of achieving equality between

and within countries (Goal 8). Further subjects of debate included the anticipated acceleration in the pace of change in the labour market, the importance of using technology to achieve gender equality (Goal 5) and the role of technology as a tool for accessing information, expressing opinions, breaking down geographical barriers and empowering women, young persons and persons with disabilities. With regard to financing for development, speakers noted that hefty defence spending came at the expense of development. Participants also noted that the gains made from combating corruption might well fully make up for the region's development financing shortfall.

Session VI. Preparatory regional consultations for sustainable development: outcome messages for the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the high-level political forum

23. Karima El Korri, Head of the ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda, moderated the session, during which a review was conducted of the key regional messages arising from the various regional consultations held in preparation for the 2019 Arab Forum and the high-level political forum. Ali Awdeh, Director of the Research Department of the Union of Arab Banks, Beirut, presented the conclusions of the international Conference on Financing Sustainable Development: Curbing Illicit Financial Flows, held in November 2018. Hager Ebaid, of the Y-PEER youth network in Cairo, Egypt, presented the results of the Youth Forum in the Arab Region, held in December 2018. Leila Ould Ali, a member of parliament, Tunisia, presented the conclusions of the Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held in January 2019. Zaghoul Samhan, Director of Planning and Policies, Ministry of Environmental Affairs, State of Palestine, presented the results of the Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum, held in February 2019. Qusai Al Shatti, strategic expert on the World Summit on the Information Society and the Internet Governance Forum, Kuwait, presented the conclusions of the second Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, held in March 2019. Hammou Laamrani, senior expert, League of Arab States, presented the results of the Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum. Lastly, Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, reported on the key conclusions of the Civil Society Organizations Forum prior to the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, held in April 2019.

Session VII. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development in a regional and global context

24. Maisaa Youssef, sustainable development officer, ESCWA Unit on the 2030 Agenda, chaired the session, in which the participants were Mohammed Khalil, former member of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals and Ahmad Al Qabbany, director of the climate change department of the Islamic Development Bank.

25. The aim of the session was to provide an opportunity to study the messages of the Forum and its position as an overarching regional tool for the various groups involved in advancing sustainable development, and to cast a glance into the immediate and midterm future as the region's countries and regional and international institutions working in it prepare for the high-level political forum in New York in 2019. The need to consider the messages of the Forum in a comprehensive framework was reaffirmed, given that achieving sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels goes beyond the scope of the 2030 Agenda. Participants noted that inequality within a given country was inextricably linked to that between

countries, given the broad similarity of economic systems and generally rising levels of poverty and impoverishment. Economic and institutional reform and diversification were vital, the digital revolution must be leveraged for the optimal use of human capital at the country level, regional cooperation and integration should be encouraged, and plans with an added-value component for the economy should be put in place to attract development financing. The link between the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change was also discussed.

26. The Forum concluded with a summary of key findings and messages reached by participants over the three days, presented by Maisaa Youssef. In the general discussion that ensued, participants voiced consensus on a range of ideas and measures, at the national and regional levels, that they considered conducive to the implementation of national sustainable development plans in line with the 2030 Agenda.

C. Special sessions

27. Nine special sessions were held to examining in greater depth a number of the Goals and various aspects of development, in line with General Assembly resolution [70/299](#) on follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level.

I. Inclusion, empowerment and equality as pathways to peace and development (Under the auspices of ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP))

28. Karam Karam, Regional Adviser on Governance and Peacebuilding, Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division, ESCWA, facilitated the session, in which the following took part: Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj, Senior Coordinator at the Common Space Initiative; Eileen Kuttab, Associate Professor of Sociology, Birzeit University, Palestine; Jonathan Moyer, Director of the Joseph Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, United States of America; and Ghaith Fariz, Director of the Regional Bureau for Sciences in the Arab States, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

29. Panellists discussed the link between peacebuilding and development; how the lack of inclusiveness, empowerment and equality contributes to conflict; and the impact of conflict and occupation on the realization of those three principles. They sketched out the dire reality of development in Palestine resulting from the Israeli occupation, stressing that the latter was responsible for holding back the Palestinians in terms of sustainable development. They also discussed the sharp drop in all development indicators in Yemen ensuing from the conflict there; in a number of areas, the country was now behind where it had been even before the outbreak of hostilities. The best way to resolve the situation was through a civil peace process in conjunction with economic stimulus and the protection of institutions. With regard to Syria, the panellists focused on the conflict that has left all sectors in a parlous state, made short shrift of rights at all levels, generated the problem of displacement and fuelled increasing poverty. They noted that rivalry between certain civil society organizations and their recourse to questionable sources of external funding had deepened the crisis. Conversely, potential solutions had also emerged, such as the use of science diplomacy to inject the subject of sustainable development into dialogue in conflict situations.

II. Advancing climate action in the Arab region (Under the auspices of ESCWA and the League of Arab States)

30. Roula Majdalani, Director of the Sustainable Development Policies Division, ESCWA, facilitated the session, in which the following took part: Ayman Shasly, Chair of the Arab Group of Climate Change Negotiators; Luna Abu Swaireh, Director of the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Lebanon; Peter Lundberg, Head of Regional Development Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa, Embassy of Sweden, Jordan; Mohamed Odeh Qasrawi, Head of the National Disaster Risk Management Centre, Palestine; Samia El Baouchi, Head of the Association Femmes Bladi pour le développement et le tourisme, Morocco; and Djamel Eddine Djaballah, Director of the Environment, Housing and Water Resources Division, League of Arab States.

31. The session was divided into two panel discussions. In the first, on setting the stage for climate action, regional and international positions on climate issues were reviewed. It was stressed that advancing climate action in the Arab region would require regional integration and closer ties between national institutions. It was also highlighted that climate adaptation measures were a priority for the region, especially in the case of vulnerable communities exposed to the devastating effects of extreme weather events and natural disasters. Participants in the second panel discussion reviewed the experience of Palestine in confronting climate change and mitigating its effects, as well as the role of civil society in applying pressure to Governments to do more in that respect. They stressed that the key to sharing the burden of dealing with climate change, its effects and associated challenges was regional integration and cooperation.

III. Ensuring sustainable and at-scale engagement of adolescents and youth in the Arab region: an interactive dialogue (Under the auspices of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA))

32. Leticia Haddad, journalist, NETMED Youth, Lebanon, facilitated the session, in which the following took part: Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (via video link); Abdelaziz Bouslah, Project Manager, Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability, Tunisia; Mohammad Makki Kalaaji, undergraduate law student, Islamic University of Lebanon; Hager Ebaid, representative of the Youth Forum in the Arab Region, Egypt; and Foued Aouni, Director of the National Youth Observatory, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport, Tunisia.

33. Discussions centred on the views and insights of young persons and the part they can play in taking decisions that will affect them immediately and in the future. Participants discussed a set of possible initiatives that could be taken at the national and regional levels, including formal and informal channels of participation. The panellists highlighted the need for a legal framework to foster investment through the involvement of young persons in various areas of development and by ensuring their participation in decision-making processes, such as the United Nations Youth Strategy (Youth2030), aimed at empowering young persons as the principal agents of change and nurturing their potential, and the UNFPA Y-PEER education network, a comprehensive peer-to-peer learning initiative to promote a healthy lifestyle among young persons and thereby enable them to make responsible decisions. They also underscored the importance of empowering young persons in the Arab region by involving them in the design of national processes, allowing them to play a full role by making them responsible and independent, fostering their social and political participation, devising innovative ways to interact with them and address their issues, and giving priority to marginalized young persons. They also stressed the need to

collect specific data and conduct surveys on young persons in the Arab region that accurately convey their needs.

IV. The future of work and its impact on gender equality – motherhood, work and the care economy in Arab States (Under the auspices of the International Labour Organization (ILO))

34. Frida Khan, Regional Adviser for Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, ILO Regional Office for the Arab States, facilitated the session, in which the following took part: Mehrinaz El Awady, Director of the ESCWA Centre for Women; Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director of UN-Women in Asia and the Pacific; Violette Safadi, Minister of State for the Social and Economic Empowerment of Youth and Women, Lebanon; Magued Osman, Professor of Statistics, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, and CEO and Managing Director of the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research (Baseera); Irum Boukhari, Secretary to the Government of Punjab, Women’s Development Department; Rana Musleh, Head of the Gender and Social Studies Department at the Social Security Corporation, Jordan; and Greg Vines, Deputy Director General of ILO.

35. Speakers suggested that changes in the labour market caused by factors such as technological development, climate change and changing demographics would lead to the creation of many new jobs, especially in artificial intelligence and data analysis, but would simultaneously destroy many current job categories. The impact of those changes on the participation of women in the labour market was discussed. Panellists said that a strong career structure for care workers could enable women to participate in economic activities and contribute to national economies and the process of development. In order to take advantage of new opportunities, Governments and civil society both needed to do their part. Governments must guarantee women’s rights in daily life and online, build their capacity and provide all segments of society with access to technology. The panellists underlined the need for the recommendations of the World Health Organization and ILO to be aligned on the recommended six-month minimum recommended period of exclusive breastfeeding.

V. The Regional Consultation on the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Under the auspices of the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and ESCWA)

36. The session was chaired by Mahmoud Ataya, Director General of the Office of the Prime Minister, Palestine, and moderated by Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development. Opening remarks were delivered by Frederico Neto, Director of the Social Development Division, ESCWA, and Jason Pronyk, Regional Manager of the UNV programme in the Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The panel was made up of Sheikha Hissa al-Thani, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, League of Arab States; Emma Morley, Head of Volunteer Advisory Services, UNV; Nadia Ben Ali, Secretary-General of the Inspectorate of Finances and Head of Mission, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Morocco; and Nader Keyrouz, regional labour statistician, ILO Regional Office for Arab States.

37. Participants reviewed the synthesis report on the United Nations plan of action for the Western Asia region issued by UNV and stressed the importance of volunteerism for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in the Arab region, where most volunteers were young men and women. They discussed the challenges involved in volunteer work, such as guaranteeing the integrity and credibility of volunteers working in countries affected by conflict, obviating the risk of their being exploited by employers, and ensuring that they benefit from the experience in the manner anticipated for which they volunteered. The experiences of

countries in which Governments have set up volunteerism systems were reviewed and the means of assessing them were discussed in the light of ILO assessment guidance currently being tested in a number of countries. Panellists stressed that the Arab countries should share experiences regarding volunteerism and conduct consultations on the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the run-up to the global technical meeting in 2020.

VI. Rethinking inequality in Arab countries (Under the auspices of ESCWA and UNDP)

38. Hala El Saeed, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt, chaired the session. The panellists were: Paul Makdisi, Professor of Economics, University of Ottawa, Canada; Khalid Abu-Ismaïl, Chief of the Economic Development and Poverty Section, ESCWA; Oussama Safa, Chief of the Social Justice Section, ESCWA; Thangavel Palanivel, Deputy Director of the Human Development Report Office of UNDP; and Milorad Kovačević, Chief Statistician in the same office. The discussants were: Ibrahim Badawi, Managing Director of the Economic Research Forum; Sherine Shawky, Social Research Center, American University in Cairo; and Najla Ali Murad, Director General of the Executive Directorate for Poverty Reduction Strategy, Iraq.

39. The key messages of a joint report, entitled *Rethinking Multidimensional Inequality in the Arab States*, which is due to be issued by the Economic Research Forum and ESCWA, were reviewed, as were the preliminary findings of the UNDP 2019 Human Development Report on inequality in human development. Participants discussed the degree of consistency across studies on prevailing inequalities in health and education in the region and how to address the challenges facing it and the wider world. They stressed the need to ensure greater equality when promoting education for all, and to incorporate pre-school learning for children under the age of 5 years into systems of free and compulsory education, given its elevated cost and importance as the foundation for later learning. Participants also emphasized the need to examine the considerable disparities in the cost of health care and public services within and across States.

VII. Advancing social justice and social cohesion through inclusive social protection in conflict-affected States (Under the auspices of UNDP and ILO)

40. Rana Jawad, Professor at the Higher Education Academy of Social and Political Sciences, University of Bath, facilitated the session. Keynote speeches were delivered by Nathalie Bouché, Regional Cluster Team Leader, Inclusive and Sustainable Growth and Development, UNDP Arab States, and Luca Pellerano, Senior Social Protection Specialist, ILO Regional Office for the Arab States. Panellists included Richard Kouyoumjian, Minister of Social Affairs, Lebanon; Najla Ali Murad, Director General of the Executive Directorate for Poverty Reduction Strategy, Ministry of Planning, Iraq; Ayman Sawalha, Adviser to the Minister of Social Development, Palestine; Hazim Rahahleh, Director General of the Social Insurance Institution, Jordan; and Musa Makin Kabashi, Director General of External Financing, the Sudan.

41. The panellists presented an overview of the social protection systems in their respective countries and the difficulties facing their Governments in providing inclusive and fair social protection services while under occupation, engulfed in conflict or under pressure from displaced persons and refugees. Participants reviewed the cases of Jordan and Lebanon, which, they noted, had endured the social and economic consequences of the displacement of Syrians over the past years and the presence for many years of Palestinian refugees. That had placed a heavy burden on social protection systems and programmes in the two countries and prompted reviews

of the relevant legislation. The experience of Palestine, where, it was noted, occupation undermined the State's capacity to provide inclusive and fair social services, was also reviewed. In Iraq and the Sudan, conflicts had fuelled a rapid increase in poverty rates, creating a need for priority social protection programmes for the inhabitants of the affected areas, something that had placed an additional burden on existing social protection programmes and funding. Participants emphasized the role that civil society and international organizations had to play in supporting social protection systems, especially in conflict-affected countries.

VIII. Strengthening partnerships to enhance coherence of national policies on and strategies for disaster risk reduction and sustainable development (Under the auspices of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction)

42. Sujit Mohanty, Chief of the Regional Office for the Arab States, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, facilitated the session, at which Mami Mizutori, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, gave a keynote speech. The session was made up of two panel discussions. The first panel, addressing the role of stakeholders in policy coherence, was composed of Nada El Agizy, Director of Sustainable Development and International Cooperation, League of Arab States; Mohamed Odeh Qasrawi, Head of the National Disaster Risk Management Centre, Palestine; and Hazar Belli Abdelkefi, Deputy Director, Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment, Tunisia. The second panel, which discussed the efforts of Governments to ensure an all-of-society approach to policy coherence for sustainable development, consisted of Emad Adly, Coordinator of the Arab Disaster Risk Reduction Civil Society Organizations Group; Heba al-Hariry, disaster risk representative for the Arab Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Group; and Chadi Abdallah, Head of the Arab Science and Technology Advisory Group for Disaster Risk Reduction, Lebanon.

43. The first panel examined disaster risk reduction policies and measures and discussed, from the standpoint of the League of Arab States, the crucial role partnership played in their successful implementation. They also discussed national experiences in Palestine and Tunisia. In the second panel discussion, speakers considered the role played by civil society organizations in disaster risk reduction and the need to encourage Governments to improve coordination and cooperation, methods of data collection and dialogue with other Governments, with a view to putting inclusiveness and equality at the heart of disaster reduction strategies. They also looked at the role of research centres in data collection and cooperation with Governments in that regard.

IX. Leaving no one behind: gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusiveness (Under the auspices of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women))

44. Rouba Arja, social affairs officer, ESCWA, facilitated the session. The panellists were Rasha Abouelazm, Regional Manager of the Men and Women for Gender Equality programme, UN-Women; Simone Ellis Oluoch-Olunya, Regional Women's Political Participation Adviser, UN-Women; Khalid Benhassan, Director of the Mohammed VI National Centre for People with Disabilities, Morocco; Sabah al-Bahlani, member of the Shura Council (parliament) and Chief Executive Officer of the Early Intervention Centre for Children with Disabilities; Safiya al-Bahlani, artist and advocate for people with disabilities; Heba Hagrass, former Secretary-General of the National Council for Disability Affairs and member of parliament, Egypt; and Angela Zettler, associate social affairs officer, Social Development Division, ESCWA.

45. The panel discussed the obstacles encountered by certain groups at risk of exclusion and the challenges associated with including them in all areas of sustainable development. Strategies and best practices for ensuring that persons with disabilities fully enjoy their rights to participate in and benefit from sustainable development were also aired. Discussion turned to United Nations programmes and strategies for ensuring the inclusion of such groups in all societies, such as a project on masculinity, which addresses the roles of women and men, especially in the family, and encompasses persons with disabilities; the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy; and the strategy for women and girls with disabilities, the first of its kind. The panel concluded that, despite such successes, more could be done to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace and to foster a favourable environment for them by allowing them to work remotely, enhancing their self-confidence, providing them with the necessary technological tools and mechanisms to work and passing laws to include them rather than treating them as a social minority.

D. Closing session

46. Ms. El Korri, closing the Forum, affirmed that the commitment of ESCWA to a participatory approach had been essential to the Forum's success. All participants contributed to the drafting of the final version of the key messages to be submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

III. Participants

47. More than 300 participants attended the Forum, including representatives of the organizing bodies, namely ESCWA, the League of Arab States, United Nations agencies and organizations working in the Arab region (members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism), high-level Government representatives, members of parliament, representatives of civil society, think tanks, the private sector, regional and Arab organizations, key groups, regional sustainable development bodies and investment funds in the Arab region, and correspondents from a number of media outlets.

48. The United Nations was represented by the Deputy Secretary-General and representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), World Food Programme (WFP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

49. More than 70 envoys from 15 Arab States attended the Forum, representing ministries and sustainable development bodies in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

Annex**Outcome documents of the preparatory meetings for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and high-level political forum on sustainable development**

Second Arab Sustainable Development Week: Taking Action, November 2018 (<http://www.lasportal.org/ar/Sectors/Dep/Pages/DepVersionsDetails.aspx?ReqID=355&RID=74&SID=1>)

First Conference on Financing for Sustainable Development, November 2018 (https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/conference_report_arabic.pdf)

Youth Forum in the Arab region, December 2018 (https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-df/Ar%20Reg%20Youth%20Forum2018_final%20for%20web%205-3-2019.pdf)

Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, January 2019 (<https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/report-parliamentary-forum-sdgs.pdf>)

Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum, February 2019 (https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/outcome_document-env_a.pdf)

Arab High-level Forum on the World Summit on the Information Society and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, March 2019 (https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/bayan_khitami.pdf)

Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-level Political Forum, February 2019 (https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/climate_change_consultation-outcome_document-arabic.pdf)

Second regional civil society forum prior to the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, April 2019 (http://www.annd.org/data/file/files/Outcome%20document_draft.pdf)
