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**Priority issues in achieving social development
in the Arab region**

Participation as a lever for social justice

Summary

The present document proposes a set of action-oriented and forward-looking recommendations that member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) can embrace to enhance social justice in the Arab region, emphasizing the central role of genuine and active broad-based participation in generating more effective public policies and fairer social outcomes. After reviewing some of the main challenges to social justice in the region at the socioeconomic and institutional levels, the document explores successful experiences of citizens' participation and civic engagement in decision-making processes in the Arab region and identifies key areas of work for ESCWA member States.

The Committee on Social Development is invited to review the content of the present document and provide comments, suggestions and recommendations thereon.

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Introduction

1. Social justice is a highly-ranked priority on the agendas of Arab Governments. It gained prominence following the uprisings when citizens demanded to benefit from the fruits of development and have their voices heard by political elites. The calls for justice, freedom and dignity that filled the streets of Tunis, Cairo and Tripoli still resonate today in public debates, a reminder for policymakers that the discontent and sense of social exclusion that had led people to protest has not yet been fully addressed. They are equally a reminder for Arab societies that transformative change is a complex process that requires deep institutional, political and socioeconomic reforms.
2. Social justice is not of concern only to countries undergoing political transition; it is a pressing issue for the Arab region as a whole. At its twenty-eighth session, held in Tunis from 15 to 18 September 2014, member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted the Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region,¹ reaffirming their commitment to social justice and acknowledging a number of shared social justice challenges, including persistent poverty and inequality, the inadequate provision of basic goods and services and high levels of unemployment. Given that the fairly steady economic growth of the past decades has not been translated into sustainable welfare for all, the foundations of the Arab development model should be revised, in line with the values of justice, which are deeply rooted in Arab and Islamic culture.
3. Social justice objectives fall under the global discussions on sustainable development goals and a post-2015 development agenda, to be agreed upon by Member States of the United Nations (see box 1). ESCWA member States have reiterated their commitment to placing the needs of the most vulnerable at the centre of their development strategies, with renewed focus on the multiple dimensions of poverty, increased access to employment, a broader provision of social protection services and a more sustainable and equitable use of natural resources.²
4. Sound social policies play a crucial role within international development strategies and national development plans, and are at the centre of member States' efforts to promote social justice. They can help eliminate the different forms of exclusion faced by the weakest segments of society and ensure meaningful and fulfilling lives for all.
5. Developing a relevant policy path to promote social justice, however, requires active participation by States and members of society to combat exclusion and discrimination. Participation goes beyond voting in elections to select political representatives; it relates to the ability of citizens to actively take part in community life, access public discussion forums and be agents in decision-making processes that impact their lives.
6. The present document argues that participation can be a powerful instrument to achieve social justice. It emphasizes the centrality of genuine and active broad-based citizen participation to the social justice framework and sheds light on some of the main challenges associated with social justice, voice and participation in the Arab region, underlining the need to make social policies more participatory and inclusive. It also sets out the successful experiences of participatory-based processes that have contributed to fostering social justice at the institutional, socioeconomic and political levels in the Arab region. It concludes by proposing a set of action-oriented and forward-looking recommendations that ESCWA member States should embrace to advance participation and civic engagement and bring about social justice.

¹ Available from www.escwa.un.org/main/docs/TunisDeclaration.pdf.

² See ESCWA, "The post-2015 UN development agenda", Social Development Bulletin, No. 3, E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper.3; and Economic Commission for Europe, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Africa, and ESCWA, *A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda*, E/ESCWA/OES/2013/2.

I. CENTRALITY OF PARTICIPATION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

7. Although, as a concept, social justice has not been consensually defined at the global level or at the level of Arab States, it can be understood as a set of values and objectives that should guide public action to ensure fair and balanced political, social and economic outcomes.

8. At its twenty-eighth session, ESCWA proposed the following definition: “social justice means equal rights and access to resources and opportunities for all, men and women, including the removal of the barriers that hinder the empowerment of disadvantaged groups to participate in decisions that govern their lives”.³ This definition is based on the core principles of equality, equity, rights and participation, anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other related international legal instruments. It emphasizes the social, economic and political dimensions of social justice and highlights the instrumental role of active citizen engagement in building inclusive and equitable societies. The remainder of this section argues that genuine and active broad-based participation in policymaking processes is central to social justice.

9. Participatory processes can be an important driver of social justice, given that they create an enabling environment for people to take part in decisions that affect their lives. Involving people at different stages of the policy cycle is critical to ensuring that implemented decisions, investments and programmes reflect their needs and priorities. Cogan and Sharpe have identified the following benefits of citizen participation for public policy planning: participation increases the flow of information and ideas on public issues; it raises public support for planning decisions; it helps avoid protracted conflicts and costly delays; it creates a reservoir of good will which can carry over to future decisions; and it builds up a spirit of cooperation and trust between the agency and the public.⁴ All of these dimensions are particularly relevant to the elaboration and implementation of social policies.

10. While the lack of voice and participation is a reinforcing factor of social injustice, participatory processes give people the opportunity to influence public policy towards fairer social outcomes. Kabeer⁵ shows that vulnerable populations often face multiple forms of deprivation; economic, cultural, spatial and political inequalities tend to intersect and reinforce each other to perpetuate exclusion.⁶ The participatory dimension is critical in this respect: when vulnerable groups cannot voice their demands and defend their interests, power imbalances are reproduced in social and economic life.⁷ In line with these observations, Fraser⁸ argues that addressing people’s demands for justice requires both redistribution and recognition remedies. In particular, she asserts that existing institutionalized patterns of cultural value and economic structures that deny individuals the opportunity to participate in social interactions and economic relations on par with others are morally wrong. Based on this understanding of the notion of injustice, she advances the normative concept of participatory parity, which can be encouraged through distributive justice, whereby material resources should be distributed in ways that ensure participants’ independence and voice, and

³ ESCWA, “Social justice in the policies of Arab States: discussion paper”, E/ESCWA/28/8 (2014). Available from: http://www.escwa.un.org/about/gov/sessions/editor/Download.asp?table_name=sess26_documents&field_name=ID&FileID=278.

⁴ See <http://pages.uoregon.edu/rgp/PPPM613/class10theory.htm>.

⁵ Naila Kabeer, “MDGs, social justice and the challenge of intersecting inequalities”, Centre for Development Policy and Research, Policy Brief No.3 (March 2011). Available from www.soas.ac.uk/cdpr/publications/pb/file66938.pdf.

⁶ According to the author, economic inequalities result from an unfair distribution of productive assets and opportunities; cultural inequalities assign individuals to a lower status and worth; spatial inequalities maintain vulnerable households in areas that are isolated and less connected; and political inequalities deprive people from voice and influence on critical issues that affect their lives.

⁷ Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, A/HRC/23/36 (2013), pp. 4-5.

⁸ Nancy Fraser, “Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, participation”, Discussion Paper (Berlin, Social Science Research Center, 1998).

through institutionalized patterns of recognition that express equal respect for all participants and provide equal opportunities for achieving social esteem.

Box 1. Social justice and participation in the post-2015 development agenda

The sustainable development goals (SDGs), to be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, are geared towards achieving a world that is just, equitable and inclusive. Building on the Millennium Development Goals' legacy, the new development agenda will encompass a wider range of social, economic and environmental objectives.

In preparation for the intergovernmental negotiations, Member States of the United Nations have identified a set of priorities and concrete actions that they will commit to implementing over the coming decades to meet the SDGs.^{a/} They have emphasized that progress should benefit all social groups and specific efforts should be deployed to ensure that “no one will be left behind”,^{b/} stressing that all peoples and groups must participate in the realization of the SDGs.

Under proposed goal 16, the new agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies, based on respect for human rights, the rule of law and effective and accountable institutions. Inclusive and participatory decision-making processes and the protection of fundamental freedoms, such as access to information, are identified as fundamental requirements to reach this goal.

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.
- 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.
- 16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime
- 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.
- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
- 16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.
- 16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.
- 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
- 16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.
- 16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

^{a/} Final draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda, “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Global Action”, July 2015.

^{b/} Ibid.

11. In the context of social justice, participation also means tackling imbalances in the distribution of opportunities for social, economic, civic and cultural participation. In a seminal paper on citizen participation, Arnstein defines participation as a redistribution of power that leads to social change as follows: “it is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. (...) In short it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society”.⁹ Developing channels to encourage the participation of weak and marginalized groups in civic, social and economic activities can help individuals move into a stronger position in relation to other actors, including public and social institutions.

12. This point was made clear in the popular uprisings and social movements that have taken place in the region over the past four years. Civil society organizations have been very effective forces in demanding citizens’ rights and changing political circumstances; they have been key engines of participation and the main drivers of political transformations in countries that have witnessed popular revolts. Traditionally marginalized groups, namely women, young people and the poor, took on an active role in these movements, calling for equality, equity, participation and the safeguarding of citizens’ basic rights; they were able to publicly express their views and feel empowered. A close examination of civil society participation and engagement in four Arab countries that have witnessed popular revolts and/or political transitions indicates that the participation of civil society organizations and activists enhanced the effectiveness of such processes and allowed for broader participation in national policy dialogues.¹⁰

13. By allowing for the needs and preferences of all segments of society to be better reflected, participatory processes can make policies more equitable and result in a fairer distribution of socioeconomic outcomes. Participation has the potential to bring social change by rebalancing power relations. However, for these changes to be sustained over time and produce positive redistribution effects, the political transitions initiated in the region since 2011 have to be supported by important policy reforms at the social, economic and institutional level. Civil society organizations can continue playing an important role in this process and increase their influence on government policy and legislation through consultations, dialogues, lobbying and direct pressure, and improve their contribution to democratization, sociopolitical reforms and good governance.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES IN THE ARAB REGION

A. MAIN FORMS OF INJUSTICE

14. Despite some marked socioeconomic and human development gains over the past two decades,¹¹ the region still faces considerable obstacles to social justice and participation. Some of the most visible injustices are observed in persistent levels of poverty and inequality; high levels of unemployment; weak governance and pervasive corruption practices; and situations of armed conflict that threaten the stability of the region.

⁹ Sherry R Arnstein, “A ladder of citizen participation”, *Journal of American Institute of Planners*, vol. 35, No. 4 (1969), pp. 216-224.

¹⁰ ESCWA, *Civil Society Development in Transition: Lessons from Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2014/Pamphlet.3, p. 1. Available from www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_SDD_14_P-3_E.pdf.

¹¹ Between 1970 and 2010, countries in the Arab region recorded the fastest progress in human development indicators in the world. See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2010: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development* (New York, 2010).

1. *Persistent poverty and inequality*

15. Over the past few decades, Arab countries have failed to significantly reduce extreme poverty, which means that the region will not meet the Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015. The share of the population living on less than 1.25 United States dollars (\$) a day in the region increased from around 4 per cent in 2010 to over 7 per cent in 2012. In Arab least developed countries, namely the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen, these shares increased from 14 per cent in 1990 to 21 per cent in 2012.¹² Many vulnerable households are struggling to meet their basic needs; an estimated 50 million people suffer from hunger in the region¹³ and Arab countries face the continuing challenge of providing safe water and improved sanitation to a growing population. ESCWA has estimated that, out of a total Arab population of 355 million in 2011, 60 million did not have access to improved drinking water sources and 71 million did not have access to improved sanitation facilities.¹⁴

16. Across the region and within countries, there are large discrepancies in terms of well-being and opportunities. ESCWA estimates that the poorest quintile of the population receives only about 9 per cent of the wealth produced in Arab Mashreq countries and less than 7 per cent in Arab Maghreb countries and least developed countries.¹⁵ In 2013, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) coefficient of human inequality, which captures average inequality in health, education and income, was above 24 in the Arab region, compared to 13 in Europe and Central Asia and 19 in East Asia and the Pacific.¹⁶ Rural to urban discrepancies are particularly large; rural households are three and a half times more likely to suffer from multidimensional deprivation than urban households,¹⁷ given that they have a lower human capital endowment; limited access to essential education, health and financial services and political authorities;¹⁸ and they are less connected to the local economy and to the labour market, making them less likely to benefit from economic progress.

2. *Unemployment*

17. Low labour force participation, high unemployment and unequal access to decent jobs also hamper the development process and the achievement of social justice. Unemployment in the region remains the highest in the world; young people are particularly affected given that one in four economically active individuals aged 15-29 is unemployed.¹⁹ Gender inequalities are strong and informal employment is widespread in the region, which creates further inequalities between workers who have access to decent jobs and social protection coverage and those who do not. The labour market situation is one of the biggest challenges that Arab countries must tackle over the coming years; the structure of the productive sector and the low growth rates of Arab economies limit job creation, and the skills mismatch and unequal access to education reinforce barriers to employment.²⁰

¹² Khalid Abu Ismail, "An Arab perspective on the post-2015 agenda: national targets, regional priorities and global goals", E/ESCWA/EDGD/2014/WP.1, p. 6.

¹³ Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁴ Estimates were based on the online database of World Health Organization/United Nations children's Fund (WHO/UNICEF) Joint Monitoring Programme – updated data 2011 (accessed June 2013).

¹⁵ ESCWA and the League of Arab States, *The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report, Facing Challenges and Looking Beyond 2015*, E/ESCWA/EDGD/2013/1, p. 7.

¹⁶ The average is calculated by an unweighted arithmetic mean of estimated inequalities in health, education and income. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-3-inequality-adjusted-human-development-index>.

¹⁷ ESCWA and the League of Arab States, *The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report*.

¹⁸ Nadia Belhaj Hassine, "Economic inequality in the Arab region", Policy Research Working Paper, No. 6911 (Washington D.C., World Bank, June 2014), pp. 25-26.

¹⁹ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global Employment Trends 2014: The Risk of a Jobless Recovery* (Geneva, 2014), pp. 63-64.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 62-66.

3. Governance and corruption

18. The prevalence of systems of governance that allow rentier economies with high levels of corruption to thrive is another factor that harms social outcomes. Corruption was one of the main reasons people took to the streets during the 2011 protests. Recent surveys by Transparency International indicate that Arab citizens continue to be wary of bribery in the public sector and in major institutions, such as political parties and the media.²¹

19. Corruption has a negative effect on economic growth and on social welfare and wealth distribution, preventing people from fully enjoying their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Gupta and others²² demonstrate that corruption increases income inequality and lowers the efficiency and quality of social services. David-Barrett²³ shows that it breeds distrust of institutions given that, regardless of their size, all bribes send a signal that the rules are not consistently applied and, as such, weaken the rule of law, which in turn negatively affects people's participation in public life.

20. While social movements are increasingly formulating demands for transparency, Governments in the region have taken measures to combat corruption and allow for more active involvement of citizens. Efforts to promote regional cooperation have been particularly interesting in this regard, for instance, through the activities of the Arab Region Parliamentarians against Corruption (ARPAC), an organization that brings together former and current parliamentarians committed to taking action against corruption, or through the ratification in 2014 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption by Oman, Palestine and the Sudan.²⁴

21. Examples also demonstrate that, if backed by public authorities, civil society and private sector initiatives can bring about structural change towards more accountability, transparency and social justice. In Lebanon, for instance, the Transparency Association has opened several advocacy and legal advice centres across the country, including in areas with large refugee populations, for citizens to report cases of corruption and seek legal advice before filing complaints. The association is also leading a campaign for the adoption of a law to protect whistleblowers and promote access to information.²⁵ In Morocco, young citizens have created a website where people can report corruption anonymously to raise awareness and push the authorities to take action.²⁶

4. Conflict and occupation

22. Armed conflict and occupation in Arab countries, including Iraq, Libya, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan and Yemen, are aggravating existing social and economic injustices and undermining instruments to protect people's rights.

²¹ Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2013* (Berlin, 2013). Available from http://issuu.com/transparencymagazine/docs/2013_globalcorruptionbarometer_en/21?e=2496456/3903358.

²² Sanjeev Gupta and others, "Does corruption affect income inequality and poverty?", IMF (International Monetary Fund) Working Paper, WP/98/76 (Washington, D.C., IMF, 1998). Available from www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/wp9876.pdf. The authors highlight the following channels of transmission: firstly, corruption drives gross domestic product (GDP) growth down; secondly, it generates biased tax systems in favour of the well-connected and the rich; thirdly, by diverting available resources away from public finances, it also lowers the efficiency and quality of social spending; and fourthly, it leads to unequal access to public services.

²³ Elizabeth David-Barrett, "Are some bribes more harmful than others? Exploring the ethics behind anti-bribery laws", *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, vol. 26, Nos. 1-2 (January-July 2014), pp. 119-144.

²⁴ Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are parties to the Convention. For more information, see www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/signatories.html.

²⁵ For more information see <https://blog.transparency.org/2014/04/22/time-for-action-lebanese-citizens-against-corruption/>.

²⁶ Available from http://www.mamdawrinch.com/reports?l=en_US.

23. Since its onset in 2011, the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic has had devastating human, social and economic consequences. It has resulted in more than 210,000 deaths;²⁷ over 7.6 million people have been internally displaced, half of them children, and about 4 million have sought refuge outside the country.²⁸ The economy has been devastated, with the loss of more than 2.3 million jobs and massive deindustrialization. Destruction and violence have pushed around 8 million people into poverty. Over 50 per cent of children have dropped out of school. With the dismantlement of formal infrastructures and operations, corruption and criminal enterprises are on the rise. The impact of the crisis on the well-being of the Syrian people and the functioning of the State will have long-lasting effects that will be hard to reverse.²⁹ The situation of refugees is presented in more detail in box 2.

24. In Libya, political tensions have spread across the country, jeopardizing the transition process and exposing the population to the arbitrary rule of non-governmental armed groups. Basic infrastructure has been significantly damaged and the humanitarian situation is rapidly regressing as hundreds of thousands are forced to flee their homes to evade deteriorating security conditions and intense clashes. The risk of the conflict descending into protracted violence is high.

25. In Yemen, pervasive tensions and compounded political instability and insecurity have resulted in a severe deterioration in socioeconomic conditions, which in turn has triggered several multidimensional challenges for a population of 25.5 million,³⁰ more than half of which suffers from extreme poverty and requires humanitarian assistance.³¹ In addition to poor governance, inadequate social services and infrastructure, gender inequalities, continued conflict and volatility have caused the destruction of vital infrastructure, rises in unemployment rates and commodity price volatility.

26. The Palestinian people are bearing the consequences of the continued Israeli occupation. At present, the number of registered Palestinian refugees in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic exceeds 3 million.³² It should be noted that Palestinians have been subjected to displacement a number of times, as is the case for thousands of Palestinians currently fleeing the conflicts in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Within Palestine, the construction of settlements and a separation wall by the Government of Israel have established a segregation system between different populations groups, further restricting the Palestinian people's access to basic rights.

5. *Women's participation*

27. Gender inequality in Arab countries manifests itself at the legal, political, economic and social levels, with varying magnitudes. While recent constitutional and legal reforms have made important strides towards empowering women and enhancing their participation, more needs to be done.

²⁷ Estimates produced by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights for the period March 2011-February 2015. Available from <http://syriahr.com/en/2015/02/about-2-millions-killed-and-wounded-in-47-months-and-it-is-still-not-enough/>.

²⁸ Estimates by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as of July 2015. Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/559d648a9.html>.

²⁹ Syrian Centre for Policy Research, *Syria: War on Development: Socioeconomic Monitoring Report of Syria*, Second quarterly report April-June 2013 (October 2013). Available from www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/md_svr-rprt_q2fnl_251013.pdf.

³⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision* (New York, 2013).

³¹ World Bank, *Republic of Yemen - Joint Social and Economic Assessment* (Washington, D.C., 2012).

³² United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), "UNRWA in figures", data as of July 2014. Available from: www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/in_figures_july_2014_en_06jan2015_1.pdf.

28. At the policymaking level, the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report³³ indicates that the majority of Arab countries lag behind in terms of female participation in economic and political life, in part as a consequence of the consistently low female political participation that has plagued the region for decades. The Arab region ranks second lowest in the world in terms of women's participation in parliaments, with women parliamentarians accounting for less than 18 per cent of members of lower houses in 2014, compared to around 23 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and almost 42 per cent in Nordic countries.³⁴ While some remarkable progress has been made to improve women's health and education, their access to employment and economic activities is still restricted. Female participation rates have shown little change over the past 30 years, despite the economic growth experienced by several Arab countries.³⁵ Only one in four women aged 15-64 in the region is employed or actively seeking a job, which is half the global average. Young women in particular are affected by extremely high levels of unemployment (around 40 per cent). The World Bank indicates that, when it comes to entrepreneurship, the region counts very few female-owned businesses (around 15 per cent), although most of them are well established and could potentially play a strong role in absorbing the growing female labour force.³⁶

29. Multiple factors can explain women's limited participation in economic and political activities. Various cultural, sociological and structural barriers remain in place. Patriarchal social norms uphold perceptions of social roles that make it more difficult for women to play an active role outside the household, to have equal access to financial resources, take legal action, interact with public authorities and seek active representation by political leaders. Legal frameworks and structural hurdles continue to marginalize women from the power structure. Violence against women also remains a pressing issue. A recent study by ESCWA has brought to light the many obstacles that women face in accessing and securing justice, and the urgent need for member States to take action at the legislative and institutional levels to better protect women from violence and discriminatory practices.³⁷

30. Against this backdrop, it is evident that women's rights and gender equality are critical factors for achieving social justice in the region. Most Arab countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), albeit with many reservations. Activists and civil society organizations for women and human rights have been persistently exerting pressure to advance women's rights. As a result, marked improvements have been recorded. In Lebanon, for example, continual efforts by civil society organizations led the Lebanese Government to enact a special law to protect women from domestic violence, albeit with some religious caveats. Similarly, in Morocco, a positive step was made in 2011 whereby, following the King's announcement of a comprehensive constitutional reform process, a women's movement established a broad coalition of civil society organizations known as the Women's Spring Coalition for Democracy and Equality, which contributed to the constitutional revision process. On a similar note, in 2004, following efforts by women's rights non-governmental organizations and civil society, Egypt amended its nationality law and allowed Egyptian women married to foreigners to transmit their nationality to their children. Following the popular uprisings of 2011, in which women's and human rights groups were actively engaged, this right was extended to Egyptian women married to Palestinian men.

³³ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2012* (Geneva, 2012). The Global Gender Gap Index 2012 benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria and provides country rankings that allow for comparisons across regions and income groups over time.

³⁴ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Women in National Parliaments, Situation as of 1 October 2014*. Available from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world011014.htm>.

³⁵ World Bank, *Opening Doors: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, D.C., 2013), p. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39; 46; 49-50.

³⁷ ESCWA, *Status of Arab Women Report – Access to Justice for Women and Girls in the Arab Region: From Ratification to Implementation of International Instruments*, E/ESCWA/ECW/2015/1.

Box 2. Refugees in the Arab region

The large numbers of refugees who have fled war and persecution constitute one of the most pressing challenges to social justice in the Arab region. Not only are refugees exposed to precarious and difficult living conditions, but their very status restricts their civil and political rights and limits their capacity to defend those rights and participate in decisions affecting their lives. Furthermore, countries and communities hosting refugees need to deal with the socioeconomic, political and insecurity ramifications of such an unprecedented influx.

Refugees and displaced persons are often exposed to difficult social and economic situations, after being forced to leave their homes, livelihoods, assets and social capital. They face a range of restrictions in terms of access to basic services, housing, employment and other social and civic activities. The fragile status of refugees is exacerbated in the Arab region, because most States lack appropriate legal instruments to grant them a legal status that protects their rights. Very few States in the region have ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, thus exposing refugee populations to further instability and uncertainty, including the risk of being deported. As a consequence, refugees' ability to engage in economic, social and civic activities is restricted.^{a/} For example, the right of Palestinian refugees to work in Lebanon is limited to specific sectors and depends on clearing a number of administrative hurdles, causing Palestinians to experience much higher levels of vulnerable employment and exploitation. Similarly, in spite of several individual initiatives aimed at supporting displaced populations at the community level, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not allowed to create or formally register nonprofit organizations, which prevents them from raising funds and from developing a more structured and established civil society.

Certain groups of refugees are particularly vulnerable, namely women and girls whose displacement can further reinforce pre-existing forms of discrimination, especially with regard to access to basic resources and services and their physical integrity and safety. Displacement can also thrust new gender roles on women, such as heading households, which they cannot always fulfil. The fate of children, who currently represent half of all refugees, also raises important social justice challenges. The United Nations Children's Fund reports that refugee children are at a greater risk of experiencing disease, malnutrition, neglect and abuse. It is estimated that almost half of Syrian refugee children are out of school and that one in ten is engaged in labour, with boys more likely to participate in the worst forms of child labour.^{b/} A rise in child marriage has also been reported, as some refugee families resort to it as a coping strategy.^{c/} The future of refugees is therefore highly uncertain; they are exposed to the risks of marginalization and to being trapped in poverty.

While Arab countries have opened their borders to several waves of refugees, most of them lack the resources to bear the socioeconomic costs related to an unprecedented flow of fragile populations. Most refugees move to countries where they compete with equally vulnerable local populations for employment, livelihood opportunities and scarce resources, such as housing, food and water. This is exacerbated when the influx is large compared to the national population, as is currently the case in Jordan and Lebanon. According to UNHCR,^{d/} in July 2015, there were more than 629,000 Syrian refugees registered in Jordan and about 1.2 million in Lebanon. In both countries, critical infrastructure and essential services are being greatly overstretched. In Lebanon, the World Bank estimates that the Lebanese economy will lose \$2.8 billion in from lost economic activity as a result of the Syrian crisis. In host communities, demographic pressures on available services and goods can contribute to deepening social fault lines and can also feed xenophobia and ethnic and sectarian tensions.

^{a/} Only Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen have ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. See <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>.

^{b/} See <http://www.unicef.org/appeals/syrianrefugees.html>.

^{c/} ESCWA, *Status of Arab Women Report*.

^{d/} See <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

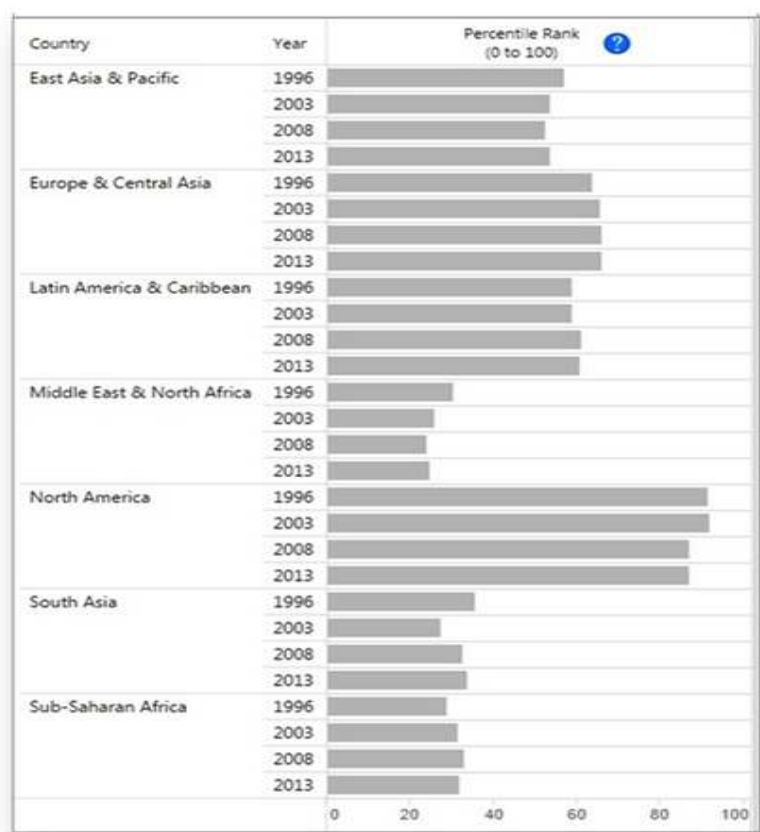
B. PARTICIPATION: THE MISSING LINK TO MORE INCLUSIVE ARAB SOCIETIES?

31. A broader engagement of stakeholders from all levels of society could contribute to poverty reduction and social justice. The existence of a safe public space where all actors can express their views and engage in constructive dialogue with authorities is, however, essential for these processes to be fruitful. Yet, in many Arab countries, institutional and legal obstacles limit such dialogue and participation.

1. *Institutional obstacles to participation*

32. Despite the fact that most Governments have embarked on vast policy and institutional reforms, policymaking in the region still lacks participation channels. The voice and accountability indicator, developed by the World Bank,³⁸ is a useful measure for understanding trends in citizens' perceptions of their ability to participate in political processes and exercise their civil and political rights. Between 1996 and 2013, the indicator registered very little progress for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which includes most Arab countries (figure I). A number of countries, however, exhibited visible improvements, in particular Iraq, Libya and Tunisia (figure II).

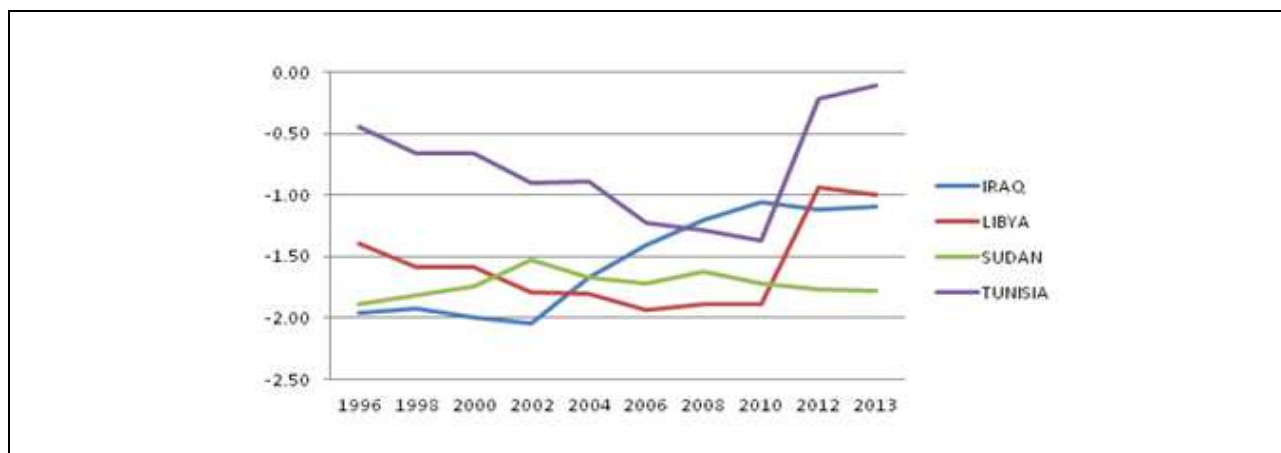
Figure I. Voice and accountability indicator, regional ranking, 1996-2013



Source: The World Bank Group, Worldwide Governance Indicators database, 2014 update. Available from <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports> (accessed 8 March 2015).

³⁸ The voice and accountability indicator is one of the six worldwide governance indicators measured by the World Bank. It captures citizens' perception of the extent to which they are able to participate in selecting their Government and benefit from freedom of expression, freedom of association and a free media. All countries are ranked in percentile rank terms from 0 to 100, based on the score they get for each governance indicator. Countries with the lowest governance score rank in the lowest percentile, while higher values correspond to countries with better governance outcomes. This ranking allows for comparisons over time and across regions. See <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>.

Figure II. Voice and accountability indicator, 1996-2013
Arab countries where progress was registered



Source: The World Bank Group, Worldwide Governance Indicators database, 2014 update. Available from <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports> (accessed 8 March 2015).

33. Civil society organizations have played an active role in demanding the economic, social and cultural rights of people in the Arab region. However, the legal and institutional environment in most countries restricts their actions and does not allow for smooth collaboration between non-governmental actors and public authorities. Restrictions placed on civil society organizations and labour unions limit their capacity to raise issues to public authorities and foster transparency and accountability; legal restrictions affecting the freedom to peacefully assemble, hold public meetings and demonstrate have been identified as key obstacles that Arab Governments should address.³⁹

2. Participatory social policies

34. The assistance-based approach that has guided macroeconomic and social policies for decades in the region is increasingly being criticized as inefficient in promoting social justice. Exploring new channels of citizen participation and empowerment in the way social policies are designed and implemented can help Arab countries accelerate their efforts to reduce poverty.

35. The development paradigm that has prevailed for decades in most Arab countries has put heavy focus on economic growth, neglecting the nexus of equality, equity, rights and participation. Exploring the political economy of social protection in Arab countries, Loewe⁴⁰ states that, for years, the very social contract between Arab States and their citizens has relied on a combination of social security and assistance provision on the one hand, and limited civic rights on the other hand. According to Loewe, social protection policies are primarily perceived as a means to reinforce Governments' political legitimacy rather than as essential tools for advancing welfare and equity. The public sector and the army have played a key role as employers, absorbing large shares of the labour force and providing income and stability to many.⁴¹ Most countries in the region offer a wide range of social protection instruments, but these are characterized by high degrees of fragmentation and complexity, and large shares of the population, who would have benefited from more targeted support, are de facto excluded from them.

³⁹ See Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review documentation. Available from www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/Documentation.aspx.

⁴⁰ Markus Loewe, "Caring for the urban middle class: the political economy of social protection in Arab countries", in *Social Protection in Developing Countries – Reforming Systems*, K. Bender and others eds. (London, 2013), pp. 195-203.

⁴¹ Rana Jawad, "Social protection in the Arab region: emerging trends and recommendations for future social policy", Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series (New York, 2014), pp. 28, 37, 42 and 44.

36. Social protection instruments, designed to attend to short-term needs, have failed to durably empower beneficiaries. Subsidies and insurance instruments aimed at addressing income shocks and fluctuations mainly rely on short-term income-smoothing and labour-market oriented measures, reflecting the assumption that economic growth mechanically shores up social development.⁴² They address one aspect of the problem, which is helping people deal with situations of hardship, but they do not acknowledge the different forms of vulnerability and socioeconomic constraints that poor individuals face. As a result, most of these programmes have failed to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality.

37. To make existing social policies and social protection schemes more efficient at promoting social justice, member States should redesign their approach to social policies and transform the culture of social service provisions from reception to participation. Strengthening vulnerable people's capacity to participate in all spheres of social, economic and cultural life and policymaking is essential to increasing their ability to build up resilient and sustainable livelihoods. Involving beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages of social policies and programmes has the potential to bring about such social change.

38. Among the many available participatory instruments, deliberative democracy is particularly interesting. According to Luskin and others,⁴³ deliberative processes have proved useful for discussing social policy issues and moving towards more cohesive societies, including in divided communities. Deliberation is defined as a form of elevated—serious, substantive and open-minded—discussion. As in democratic regimes, the legitimacy of policy choices lies in the will of the people, therefore individuals taking part in decision-making should be well informed before forging their judgment and all voices should have an equal chance to be heard.⁴⁴ Experiences have demonstrated that deliberation can induce learning, as participants become more informed and balanced in their views, and can change policy attitudes and foster better citizenship by encouraging participatory behaviours and acceptance of others.

III. PARTICIPATORY-BASED SOCIAL JUSTICE: ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE ARAB REGION

39. The Arab region is changing dramatically at the social, economical, political and cultural levels. Social justice is now at the forefront of concerns of not only reformers and social activists, but also politicians, businesses, non-governmental organizations, trade unions and economists. The present section explores recent attempts by member States to achieve social justice through participatory reform processes. It then delineates concrete efforts needed to improve social justice and mainstream it in national development plans and reform initiatives, so that it becomes a solid foundation for the achievement of civic and human rights for all citizens in the Arab region.

40. Following the 2011 political uprisings, several Arab Governments engaged in constitutional and electoral reforms. Constitutional revisions in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen, and to a certain extent in Jordan, have offered an important opportunity for long-term change towards more democratic regimes and new social contracts between citizens and States. In Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen, national dialogues and consultations with political parties, labour unions and civil society were held prior to the drafting of new constitutions; these consultations served as an important vehicle for citizen engagement and contributed to institutionalizing civic participation. In Egypt, this inclusive process was manifested through the high participation rate of women in a referendum held in January 2014 to endorse the new Constitution, whereby an estimated 55 per cent of registered women took part in the voting process.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁴³ Robert Luskin and others, "Deliberating across deep divides", *Political Studies*, vol. 62, No. 1 (March 2014), p. 5.

⁴⁴ James Fishkin, "Deliberation by the people themselves: entry points for the public voice", *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics and Policy*, vol. 12, No. 4 (December 2013).

⁴⁵ Edward Yeranian, "Officials push for high turnout on final day of Egypt referendum", *Voice of America*, 15 January 2014. Available from www.voanews.com/content/egyptians-vote-on-final-day-of-constitutional-referendum/1830389.html.

41. Social justice principles have been at the core of constitutional and electoral reform processes in Arab States. They were clearly referred to in several of the revised constitutions, including articles 8 and 9 of the Egyptian Constitution, adopted on 18 January 2014, which assert that Egyptian society is based on social solidarity and that the State shall achieve social justice to ensure a decent life for all and equal opportunities;⁴⁶ article 12 of the Tunisian Constitution, adopted on 26 January 2014, which refers directly to social justice stating that “the State shall seek to achieve social justice, sustainable development and balance between regions based on development indicators and the principle of positive discrimination”;⁴⁷ and article 12 of the revised Moroccan Constitution, adopted on 1 July 2011, which reiterates the role of civil society and article 170, which constitutionalizes the Advisory Council on Youth and Civil Society Organizations.⁴⁸ These changes reflect significant commitments by member States to promote the values of liberty, equality, justice, dignity and citizenship. In Saudi Arabia, a step was made in favour of women’s participation in public policy through the adoption of a royal decree in 2013 appointing women to the Shura Council, whose role is to advise the King and his Government on legislation.⁴⁹ While national dialogues and free elections are important mechanisms for achieving social justice and broad-based participation, it is still unclear, however, to what extent these dialogues and new constitutional provisions can move Arab societies towards the realization of good governance and democracy, which are also vital to achieving social justice.

42. Examples of government initiatives and reforms geared towards social justice and participation abound in Arab countries, which exhibit varying levels and forms of participatory social justice at both the community and national levels (including national dialogue committees, youth movements, women’s rights initiatives, ad hoc groups formed for participatory consultation and social media platforms).⁵⁰ Following the popular movements and the upsurge of civic activism, Governments and civil society organizations have deliberately sought to operationalize social justice and establish its participatory mechanisms through varied multisectoral means.

43. Since the start of its transition, Tunisia has been looking at multiple means for developing social justice by reforming food and energy subsidies and ensuring proper targeting; reforming the retirement pension plan and health insurance scheme; developing human resources by upgrading and advancing educational systems (including teaching and training); and enhancing the quality of the public health system. According to a recent report, the highest-income households in Tunisia benefited around 40 times more than lowest-income groups from energy subsidies before the transition,⁵¹ which has led the Tunisian Government to increase fuel prices by 8 per cent over the past two years to eliminate energy subsidies. Along these lines, the Tunisian Government launched the National Energy Dialogue in 2013, bringing together stakeholders to discuss the future of energy production and consumption in Tunisia.⁵²

⁴⁶ Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt. Available from www.sis.gov.eg/Newvvr/Dustor-en001.pdf.

⁴⁷ Constitute Project, Tunisia’s Constitution of 2014. Available from www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf.

⁴⁸ Available in French from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_127076.pdf. (The Council’s denomination in French is *Conseil consultatif de la jeunesse et de l’action associative*).

⁴⁹ The Decree established that a minimum of 30 out of 150 members of the Shura Council should be women. See <http://www.shura.gov.sa/wps/wcm/connect/shuraen/internet/Laws+and+Regulations/The+Shura+Council+and+the+Rules+and+Regulations+Job/Shura+Council+Law/>.

⁵⁰ ESCWA, *Civil Society Development in Transition*.

⁵¹ Carlo Sdravovich and others, *Subsidy Reform in the Middle East and North Africa: Recent Progress and Challenges Ahead* (Washington D.C., IMF, 2014), p. 18. Available from www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/dp/2014/1403med.pdf.

⁵² Carole Nakhle, “Tunisia treads cautiously over energy reform in post-revolution recovery”, 3 November 2014. Available from www.crystallenergy.com/tunisia-treads-cautiously-energy-reform-post-revolution-recovery/.

44. Steps taken by the Tunisian Government to improve the situation of persons with disabilities offer another interesting illustration of participatory-oriented policy in the country. Tunisia was one of the first countries in the world to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, but the implementation of both treaties remains limited. Persons with disabilities face many obstacles to participation, including playing an active part in political processes and elections. With the help of local non-governmental organizations advocating the rights of persons with disabilities, legal instruments were introduced to better protect and enforce the right to vote for this population group. An ordinance conducted on 4 October 2011 and an amended decree (law 2011-35 of 10 May 2011) have established measures to facilitate the right to vote for persons with disabilities and have given the Independent Higher Authority of the Election the mandate to take all necessary measures to allow disabled voters to exercise their right to vote in favourable conditions. These steps have been welcomed by Tunisian civil society and, although difficulties remain, they have had a direct impact on the organization of elections held since then.⁵³

45. In early 2015, the Tunisian Government announced its plan to increase the retirement age by two years (to 62) to reduce social security fund deficits and the fiscal burden, so as to free up the State budget for other types of social spending.⁵⁴ This prospective reform is part of a series of reforms to ease budget strains for the upcoming fiscal years. Further dialogue with labour unions and civil society organizations and close monitoring of these reforms is crucial to ensuring that any negative effects on the welfare of the most vulnerable population groups are cushioned by targeted measures.

46. Morocco also offers some interesting illustrations of participatory-oriented policies. Strengthening the social and human capacity of local actors and civil society organizations has become a priority of human development programmes in Morocco. It is actually one of the main pillars of the Agency for Social Development's strategy. However, the country lacks a proper regulatory framework with regard to associations and civil society activities. The Commission on National Dialogue, formed in March 2013, has been tasked with drafting a national code to better define and protect the right to form associations and to better involve civic organizations in public policymaking. The Commission conducted wide consultations with stakeholders from civil society and provided a platform for inclusive participation through which the concerns of civil society organizations and of Moroccans residing abroad regarding social issues, public policy and future legislative reforms were voiced. The outcome documents of these consultations fed into the organic law currently being prepared by the Government.⁵⁵

47. In Palestine, the Government is also using a participatory approach within its social protection framework. As part of a pilot experiment, some of the Ministry of Social Affairs district offices that manage cash-transfer programmes have been encouraged to establish partnerships with local actors, such as non-governmental organizations, communities and offices of other ministries, and to promote participatory-based processes to identify beneficiaries' needs and priorities.⁵⁶ Beneficiary councils and a complaint system are being formed to allow recipients to provide feedback and file reports in cases of mismanagement. The objective is to encourage all stakeholders to play a more active part in the different phases of the programme. Furthermore, support is being provided to communities and civil society representatives to build their advocacy capacity and equip them with the necessary skills to interact with public authorities and formulate

⁵³ International Disability Alliance, "The right to vote and to stand for election", IDA Human Rights Publication Series, Issue 1 (March 2013). Available from <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/disalliance.e-presentaciones.net/files/public/files/Full%20Version%20IDA%20Publication%20Series.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Tarek Amara, "Tunisia to lift retirement age two years to ease fiscal plight", *Reuters*, 20 October 2014. Available from www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/20/us-mideast-investment-tunisia-idUSKCN0I90VH20141020.

⁵⁵ Adnane Bennis, "Morocco national dialogue for civil society concludes legislative phase with draft code", *Morocco World News*, 27 May 2014. Available from www.moroccoworldnews.com/2014/05/131439/morocco-national-dialogue-for-civil-society-concludes-legislative-phase-with-draft-code/.

⁵⁶ Personal communication with Mr. Daoud Deek, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Affairs, Palestinian Authority, 1 July 2014.

their demands.⁵⁷ These initiatives are expected to contribute to building a culture of dialogue and trust between different actors and strengthening accountability mechanisms to improve social protection service design and delivery, in a context of instability and occupation.

48. Over the years, civil society has also taken on the major role of providing support to Arab citizens in situations of conflict and emergencies. In conflict situations, the delivery of public services is often disrupted and can be used for partisan gains, forcing citizens to find coping strategies. In the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, since 2011, the role of local coordination committees formed by voluntary citizens has been crucial in providing civilian populations with medical and legal services and humanitarian aid. Some local committees have become centres of civic authority in a country where public institutions are failing.⁵⁸

49. Across the region, investments have been made to improve citizen and business access to public administration through e-governance. According to the 2014 United Nations E-Government Survey, Bahrain ranks amongst the top 20 countries of the world in terms of e-governance, as measured by the E-Government Development Index (EGDI). Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates all have EGDI scores above the world average, which highlights the leading role that the region is playing with regard to e-governance. The use of information and communications technology in public administration makes it easier for end-users to access information and carry out administrative transactions. Combining public administration and governance reforms, such practices have the potential to foster transparency and trust and facilitate citizens' participation in public life.

50. In conclusion, and through a participatory social development lens, social justice should be transformational in the sense that it should empower poor and disadvantaged groups and address the structural causes of social exclusion. The relationship between participation and social justice is mutually reinforcing and linking participation and social justice from a rights-based perspective undeniably offers the most promising way forward for an Arab region that is already making efforts to attain the ideals of justice.

IV. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

51. Social justice has powerfully influenced public debates and development agendas across the Arab region, but its achievement depends on a number of fundamental socioeconomic and political reforms in countries that are still undergoing political transition and deep institutional transformations. In a context of moderate growth and increasingly strained public budgets, Arab Governments need to build new forms of consensus on public choices across societies. ESCWA encourages its member States to do so through broad-based participation processes in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies and plans that facilitate deliberation and empower communities and citizens.

52. Based on the above, to develop a clear vision and practical application of participatory-based social justice in the region, it is recommended that ESCWA member States take into consideration the following:

(a) Developing and institutionalizing a national framework for the promotion of social justice, based on the pillars of equity, equality, rights and participation, with the objective of mainstreaming social justice in national development plans, strategies and policies; and deepening the capacity and effectiveness of public institutions to achieve nationally identified goals and improve the provision of public goods and services;

⁵⁷ See www.britishcouncil.ps/en/programmes/society/tajaawob.

⁵⁸ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Syria in Crisis: local coordination committees of Syria. Webpage accessed on 4 December 2014, available from <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=50426&reloadFlag=1>.

(b) Institutionalizing participatory mechanisms, through legal and institutional measures, to allow all stakeholders, including civil society institutions, to contribute to the formulation, implementation and monitoring of major policies, such as social policies or fiscal reforms. In particular, member States are encouraged to:

- (i) Develop solid partnerships between Governments, civil society and the private sector;
- (ii) Create platforms for discussions and debate on draft policies and plans;
- (iii) Explore and adopt participatory tools to capture people's voices and preferences over public policies and programmes, such as national dialogues and consultations, deliberative processes and observatories, and ensure that the outcomes of such multi-stakeholder consultations are translated into concrete measures;
- (iv) Involve representatives from civil society in the monitoring and evaluation of public programmes to foster a culture of accountability and transparency;
- (v) Conduct awareness raising campaigns on citizenship, participation, and social justice values;

(c) Promoting an ethic of responsible citizenry and civic engagement at the local level to ensure that reforms are the product of consensus and broad-based participation;

(d) Pursuing efforts to enforce the provisions of ratified international human rights instruments that affirm the importance of inclusion and participation in public life; and considering becoming parties to human rights treaties that have not yet been ratified, including the International Covenant on Social Economic and Cultural rights, and the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights and their additional protocols;

(e) Ensuring that national development policies are inclusive, by undertaking measures towards the elimination of the legal, structural, physical, communication and attitudinal barriers that limit the participation of groups that can experience multiple forms of discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, ethnic or social origin or any other status;

(f) Developing policies, action plans and establishing mechanisms to ensure women's participation in decision-making in economic, social, legal and political fields, including in post-conflict and transitional processes, such as national dialogues, transitional justice and constitutional processes, by enacting and enforcing special laws and policies, including temporary special measures, that contribute to achieving gender equality and women's human rights;

(g) Developing country-specific social protection strategies that expand social protection coverage through contributory social insurance and establishing social protection floors to address the needs of different population groups that cannot be included promptly into contributory social security schemes;

(h) Enhancing fiscal space for expenditures aimed at addressing inequality, by considering options such as phasing out of poorly targeted subsidies, enacting progressive taxation, enhancing public-private partnerships and promoting more efficient and effective use of windfall fuel-related and other natural resources revenues;

(i) Pursuing policies to reduce unemployment, including long-term measures, and reforms to address the mismatch between the outcomes of the educational system and the requirements of the labour market and improving economic governance systems; and adopting short-term measures such as enhancing the employment-generating impact of macroeconomic policies and reforming public employment services.
