Regional UNSDG | Arab States/Middle East and North Africa 2018 Summary Report

1. Strengthening Regional Collaboration

Since the release of the Secretary General's December 2017 report and the subsequent General Assembly resolution (A/72/L.52) on the *"Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system"*, adopted in May 2018, the Regional UNSDG and Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States/Middle East and North Africa (AS/MENA) have been actively working toward optimising existing regional arrangements at the regional level.

Back-to-back R-UNSDG and RCM meetings have taken place since 2017. In the most recent meeting in October 2018, a number of proposals for strengthening collaboration at the regional level were discussed and agreed. Building on these proposals, an Operational Framework for Collaboration between the R-UNSDG and RCM has been developed. The framework outlines key objectives and principles for collaboration between UNDS entities in the region and identifies a number of key actions to be taken in 2019 to strengthen collaboration, including:

1. **Establishing Joint RCM R-UNSDG Meetings and Secretariat –** RCM and R-UNSDG meetings have been held back to back since 2017. Going forward, the RCM R-UNSDG will have joint meetings (supported by a Joint Secretariat) with a segment for UN entities and a segment including other actors, such as LAS and IFIs.
2. **Developing a Regional Strategic Framework –** develop a regional strategic framework as a collective vision for the UNDS in the Arab states to promote collective analysis of regional priorities, identify themes for future regional coordination meetings, rationalize Working Groups and provide guidance on mainstreaming transboundary and cross-cutting issues for CCAs and UNDAFs.
3. **Establishing Joint Regional Working Groups –** RCM and R-UNSDG currently have a total of 11 Working Groups. These would be consolidated under a single coordination architecture to allow for regular strategic review and promote alignment with other inter-agency groups.
4. **Strengthening Coordination on SDG Data –** all UN agencies working at the regional level would have access to a common set of regional data that is reviewed and validated, to allow for coherent regional analysis and reports and to design evidence-based policies and programmes.
5. **Coordinating Regional Publications and Knowledge Products –** strengthen coordination among regional UNDS and strengthen synergies in research and analysis efforts, reducing duplication. An incremental and iterative approach is proposed, starting with collecting and sharing information about plans for major regional reports.

2. Coordinated Support to the 2030 Agenda

In 2018, providing coordinating support to the 2030 Agenda continued to be a major focus of the Regional UNSDG. Since its establishment in March 2018, the SDG Country Support Taskforce, under the joint RCM R-UNDG Working Group on the 2030 Agenda, has been actively engaging with UNCTs to provide support on the SDGs. The SDG Country Support Taskforce completed a stock-taking of UNCT support to the 2030 Agenda at the country level to map what support has been provided and/or is planned by UNCTs in support of the 2030 Agenda, and to identify potential UNCT support requirements from the Regional UNSDG (and other actors). Based on the stock-taking, the Taskforce has identified strategic entry points for engagement with UNCTs. Likewise, in response to needs identified through the UNCT SDG Stock-taking exercise, the Taskforce undertook a mapping of existing SDG tools and resource. A total of 140 tools and resources were identified and compiled into a database that has been shared with UNCTs.

The Taskforce has also initiated a mapping of regional capacities to support the 2030 Agenda. The objective of the mapping is to provide a clear outline of the available technical and programmatic skills, capacities and resources at the regional level, including possible capacity gaps, to enable the SDG Country Support Task Force to provide support to UNCTs for the realization of the 2030 Agenda. The mapping will also make recommendations for the better utilisation/deployment of capacities, as well as for addressing capacity gaps. The results of the mapping are expected to be available in Q1 2019.

3. Advancing Gender Equality in the Region

3.1 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

Through the Regional Gender Theme Group (R-GTG), co-chaired by UN Women and UNFPA, a coordinated public awareness campaign for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence was undertaken in 2018. The campaign started with an event hosted by the League of Arab States and a joint statement issued by the UN R-GTG and League of Arab States on the occasion of the kick-off of the 16 Days of Activism. The event also featured the participation of Mr. Dhafer L'Abidine, Tunisian actor and gender equality advocate, and Ms. Yousra, Egyptian actress and UNAIDS Regional Goodwill Ambassador for the Middle East and North Africa, who joined the event to show support and solidarity with survivors of violence in the region.

The launch activity was followed by a coordinated social media campaign consisting of 16 social media cards highlighting different facts and figures related to violence against women and girls in the Arab States region and an Arabic language translation of the official #HearMeToo (#Ismaani) to encourage public engagement and dissemination of the informationthroughout the 16 Days.

3.2 Gender Justice Country Studies

2018 also saw a significant regional initiative by four members of the Regional Gender Theme Group (UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP and ESCWA) concerning the validation and publication of Gender Justice Country Studies (mapping of laws and policies addressing Gender Based Violence). The 18 country studies from

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the region were launched on the 10th of December, Human Rights Day, which also marked the last day of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence.

3.3 Arab Women in Leadership Initiative

Through the Arab Women in Leadership Initiative, coordinated by UN Women and the R-UNSDG Secretariat in partnership with UNSSC, the Regional UNSDG for Arab States has continued its commitment to support and promote Arab women to leadership positions within the UN. Started in 2016 and in line with the Secretary-General's commitment to achieve gender parity at all levels of the UN, the initiative promotes and supports leadership of women across UN agencies in the region, through access to targeted training, capacity development, learning opportunities, coaching and mentoring. The initiative has two tracks, with Track I focusing on senior management (P5-D1) to support participants to enter the RC pool, while Track II focusses on mid-level management (NOC – P4 level) to build a talent pipeline of female leaders within the region who can be coached and mentored over the short to medium term with a view to obtaining senior management positions in the future.

In 2018, 8 women from 6 agencies received training under Track II of the initiative, bringing the total number of Track II participants to 15. Under Track 1, conducted in 2016, 6 participants received training and of these, at least two participants have successfully completed the RC assessment and a third has been appointed to a Regional Director position.

4. Advancing Inclusive and Sustainable Social Protection in the response to the Syrian Crisis

In 2018, a Working Paper on "*Advancing Inclusive and Sustainable Social Protection in the response to the Syrian Crisis*" was developed. Within the framework of the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, the paper seeks to promote a new vision towards a more integrated, effective and sustainable response to social protection needs of refugees, IDPs and vulnerable host communities. The paper provides an overview of the social assistance response by humanitarian and development partners across the various sectors of the Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), including available evidences on the impacts of programs. It sheds light on recent shifts in delivery models – particularly for cash-based assistance, and identifies challenges and opportunities for scaling up successful models. It also demonstrates the potential of current interventions to spur transformative changes towards greater inclusiveness, efficiency, accountability and sustainability in national systems through integrated and multi-purpose assistance, and advocates for the international community and donors to support the establishment of new and creative financing mechanisms that can help pool and bridge humanitarian and development funding to cover gaps, including capacity gaps in national social protection systems.

A summary brief of the paper, providing the main insights and key messages of the paper at the "*Meeting for a Renewed Resilience Commitment"* organized by UNDP Arab States Sub-Regional Response Facility for the Syria Crisis on 16 April, ahead of the Brussel Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region.

Building on this, a Guidance Note for incorporating social protection in national responses was developed and included as part of the 3RP guidance package for the 2019/20 planning, with a view to ensuring that social protection is a key component of the national responses plans.

5. Responding to the needs of young people in the region

5.1 Putting evidence at the forefront of Youth programming

The Regional UN Inter-Agency Technical Team on Young People led by UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR, ILO, ESCWA in partnership with academia, adolescents and youth, donors and the regional UN:NGO group, organized the second annual Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth in the Middle East and North Africa. The symposium has demonstrated the feasibility and value of genuine partnership with young people including some of the most vulnerable – as they play a leading role in the design, implementation and follow up of solution-oriented discussions. This year's symposium saw sustainable and scalable solutions implemented by government partners juxtaposed with innovative solutions proposed by young people to address the two priority issues: 1) the transition from education to employment and 2) the mitigation of and response to violence experienced by young people. Donors and practitioners committed to:

- **Promoting and implementing disaggregation of data** wherever possible, to enable more effective analysis of the situation for male and female adolescents (10-19); and male and female youth (15-24).
- **Supporting the generation, sharing and use of evidence** to inform policy-making and programming to address the priorities and needs of youth, including in relation to easing the transition from education to employment, and prevention and response to violence.
- **Supporting efforts to fill the gaps in evidence and solutions,** notably in the area of prevention and response to the many forms of violence experienced by young people in MENA, including Gender Based Violence – noting that technology and innovations have the potential to play an important role in tackling violence and the discrimination that underpins it.
- **Supporting and making the space for the perspectives, opinions and voices of young people to be heard** in discussions and decision-making processes affecting their future.
- **Building the systematic participation of adolescents and youth into programming**.

5.2 Promoting a new learning agenda for the region through the Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Initiative.

The Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Initiative[1] – led by UNICEF,, UNFPA, ILO, UNESCO, UNHCR, WFP, UNRWA, Arab League Education Organization/ALESCO, Arab Institute for Human Rights/AIHR, Birzeit University/BZU from Palestine, International Youth Foundation/IYF, NRC, and DHL - provides a regional framework for reimagining education and learning, aimed at fostering a generation that is ready to Learn, to be Employed, to Actively engage, and to take control over one's own Personal growth and empowerment. The LSCE framework reflects the multi-dimensionality of learning – skills for learning, skills

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[1] For further information on the LSCE Initiative and related resources visit: http://www.lsce-mena.org/

for employability, skills for personal empowerment, and skills for active citizenship. All countries in the region are at various stages of rolling youth the LSCE initiative with support from the regional UN team.

In MENA, life skills are integrated into: national education sector reforms; TVET strategies and systems; co-curricular/extra-curricular teaching and learning in formal and non-formal education, and reinforced through civic, social and economic engagement initiatives. UNICEF and the WB are currently developing LSCE measurement tools to assess life-skills amongst adolescents aged 12-14.

5.3 Enabling Systematic Engagement of Adolescents and Youth in MENA

In order to achieve a transformative leap and qualitative improvement and growth in youth in Arab countries, there is need to build on the overall approach and to develop youth policies and strategies within a framework that upholds their rights and fulfils their potential as they help optimize national sustainable development efforts in their respective countries. Such an approach calls for a dedicated regional space or platform, creative and effectively dynamic, where young people can be brought together to meet on a regular basis with concerned decision makers and other relevant stakeholders to promote dialogue and synergies. In this connection, UNFPA partnered with UNWOMEN, OCHA, IOM, UNICEF, and ILO as   well as the Mediterranean Forum for Youth and the World Organization of the Scout Movement to convene the first-ever Youth Forum in the Arab Region, which was held in Assilah, Kingdom of Morocco from 19-21 December 2018. The Forum was attended by some 250 participants from 20 Arab countries. More than half of the attendees being adolescents and youth (aged 10-29), participants also included high-level representatives of Arab Governments including Ministers, Secretary Generals and Director Generals as well as members of parliament, youth networks and association and other civil society organizations, representatives from the private sector and academia, UN agencies and other international and regional development partners, plus experts and influencers among them actors, musicians and social media bloggers. The Forum's main objective is to set and advance the youth agenda while and promoting youth, peace and development in the Arab States. The aim is a dynamic, rights-based and representative regional platform that consults, engages and proposes actionable and innovative solutions on youth issues and challenges by bringing together representatives of all relevant stakeholders. The sessions focused on defining elements of a new paradigm and narrative on adolescents and youth in the region. Themes were Innovation, Youth, Peace and Security with the objective of ensuring a strong foundation for subsequent editions of the Forum. It included the launch of a Regional Strategic Framework on youth, Peace and Security in Arab States. Participants agreed on several key messages, grouped by issue according to session discussions and highlighted in the Forum outcome summary statement -- The Assilah Call for Action. This report will be widely disseminated to relevant regional and international fora such as the 2019 ECOSOC Youth Forum and the 2019 EURO-Arab Youth Forum and shared also with different partners such as the Regional UN Development Group.

To ensure systematic engagement of young people in regional humanitarian and development programming, the UN Interagency Technical Team on Young People and the UN:NGO group established the Regional Adolescents and Youth Advisory Majlis (RAYAM) – a sustainable and inclusive regional platform for young people from the MENA region, particularly young people whose voices are rarely heard and those who are civically engaged and demonstrate leadership in their communities and among peers. The network includes representatives from regional youth groups, national advisory groups, child/youth parliament members, young people from NGO groups and youth networks. RAYAM, provides an avenue

for young people to share their voices, ideas, opinions to influence decision-making processes on issues of concern to them. The UN:NGO group facilitates access of RAYAM to various decision making for a/visibility platforms. Discussions among young people occur through an online (secure platform), surveys and offline/in person discussions when feasible.

To highlight current key opportunities and explore ways to optimize investment in youth skills and youth-related innovation and rights to foster necessary transformative change and accelerate achieving sustainable development in the Arab States, UNESCWA and UNFPA partnered with LAS and other UN partners to convene a Special Session entitled "Investing in Youth Skills, Innovation and Rights to Foster Transformative Change Leading to Sustainable Development in Arab States" as part of the 2018 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development that took place in the UN House in Beirut, Lebanon from 24 to 26 April 2018. The main envisaged themes of interactive discussion were the Role of Youth in in pushing for transformative change (identifying existing and potential innovations/innovative approaches required to boost transformative change; discussing the use of science, technology and innovations in facilitating youth engagement for sustainable consumption and production patterns and/or resilience; and, discussing right-based approaches to ensure that youth have the right skill set that would empower them to participate equally and meaningfully) and Emerging opportunities for youth (the future of work related to natural resources, including emerging markets such as green economy ; and, showcasing successful examples of current opportunities\initiatives to invest in youth skills, rights & innovation). Subsequently, the outcome document of the Forum recommended that UNSCR2250 on Youth, Peace and Security as an adequate framework for youth policies and programs that will contribute to achievement of sustainable development in the Arab States.

6. Promoting coherent approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism

A one-day inter-agency consultation on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) in Amman in January 2018. The key objectives of the consultation were to 1) develop a common understanding/definition of PVE/VE among the working group members, 2) better understand national and UN PVE strategies and approaches in the Arab States, and document good practices and lessons learnt from these experiences and 3) identify and agree activities that be undertaken by the Working Group to support PVE work at the country level.

The consultation was organised around three main sessions, namely 1) Latest Developments/Trends in Violent Extremism in the Arab States Region, 2) Experiences and Lessons Learnt from UN PVE Support/Implementation at the Country Level, and 3) Monitoring and Evaluation of PVE interventions, with a total of 20 colleagues from 9 agencies attending. Building on experiences from Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia, the consultation identified challenges and opportunities related to PVE programming, both in terms of the all-of-UN PVE approach as well as in assistance to the development of national PVE strategies.