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ESCWA's national plans Database

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Abstract

The Database of National Planning (DNP) compiled by the Economic Governance and Planning Section at UN-ESCWA provides standardised indicators about development planning practices in the Arab region in order to facilitate policy analysis and scholarly work. The goal of the DNP is to assess current policy practices in the Arab region against international standards of 'good planning', and facilitate identification of potential for improvement of planning practices. The database may also be used to monitor countries' achievements towards their stated goals, mainstream international agendas in Arab countries' planning thus informing the public debate and contributing toward aligning people's expectations.

The paper describes the framework used to ensure comparability of individual planning initiatives across the region. It provides detailed description of data gathering, and data treatment methodology. It explains the database structure and operations. It exemplifies ways to compute composite assessment indicators, currently based on the degree of 'quality' and 'sophistication' of planning in the Arab region. Finally, the paper explicitly reports the limitations of the database for meaningful analyses and cross-country comparisons and way forward.

Currently, the National Planning Database contains selected planning data series for seventeen of ESCWA's member states and Algeria; however, there is no information available for Syria, Comoros, Djibouti and Somalia. The qualitative and quantitative information compiled comes from Arab countries' planning documents readily accessible online. The methodological paper is intended to be a living guide, whereby additional or updated information can be added when available and as appropriate.

I. Introduction

The Database of National Planning (further referred to as the Database or DNP) reflects a major effort from the Economic Governance and Planning Section (EGPS) at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA). The DNP is intended to advance development planning's quality by shedding light on planning practices at the country level for eighteen Arab countries, mainly members of ESCWA, for which information is publicly available.¹ The DNP aims to collect, standardize and simplify data management processes to document the common features of development planning in the Arab region. Furthermore, its purpose is to make available to policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders information on planning processes in the Arab region, assembled in a comparable manner, so as to encourage cross-country learning and good practices identification for evidence-based policymaking in the region.

The Database is a first attempt at addressing the strong need for better information on planning practices and processes from policymakers, researchers, civil society and the private sector. In its current form, the Database should be seen as a first step in provoking exchange of ideas by making information on planning publicly available. The Database could play a key role in advancing policy reform as it can be used as a tool to inform the political debate, and facilitate dialogue and negotiation between Arab governments and the civil society. As such, the Database can foster expectations' convergence throughout the society and towards the government's stated development targets. It can further help enable analysis of economic policies and achievements, in terms of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The methodology and Database put forward, although in their initial stage, are considered by ESCWA as key tools for advancing the understanding and improvement of strategic planning practices in the Arab region. Nevertheless, the obtained picture is not definitive; this shall be refined through feedback from interested parties and it will evolve as a collectively generated analytical tool.

The Database offers the possibility to group data based on various national characteristics (for example, income level or resource/labor endowment), as well as a function of basic filtering and comparison of the selected classified variables of national planning. Therefore, an environment was created allowing a clear linkage between key performance indicators (KPIs) incorporated in individual national plans, which envision a measurable progress of a country, and their affiliation to individual sectors, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),² which present concrete quantifiable guidelines for countries to follow. In this regard, the methodology for data classification and standardization developed offers a manual for future accumulation of data and for effective mainstreaming of international agendas in Arab countries' planning documents.

Worth noticing that throughout the paper, tables are provided that reproduces the organization of the Database and show where the relevant information can be found. Further, a colour code was used for columns' headings that reflects the network methodology analysis on which the design of the Database is based (Annex 1). Finally, 'thresholds' have been used throughout the Database that are based on common knowledge. As an example, a 'short-term' timespan is considered to cover less than 3 years, In the same vein, a document is considered multisectoral if it comprises more than 10 fully identified key performance indicators for at least two different economic sectors. All of these 'thresholds' can be changed by the user.

¹ Data are not available for Syria.

² UNESCO, "Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators" (New York: The United Nations Economic and Social Council, March 2017), 15–39, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/documents/2017-2-IAEG-SDGs-E.pdf>.

The paper describes the main phases in the development of the database, from the information that was collected, to its standardization and classification.³ The DNP uses country information from adopted planning documents that are readily available online. This paper is organized as follows. The second section addresses the issue of the selection of the relevant documents and reviews the informative part of the Database that provides the basic information about the selected documents. The third section provides details about the two steps process towards the re-classification of planning documents for cross-country comparability, namely the transcriptive part of the Database where information found in the documents are directly recorded, and the analytical part of the Database where international standards for good planning are used to evaluate planning documents. The criteria for good planning range from the definition of key performance indicators, to the hierarchy of planning documents, the documents' coverage and sectoral approach. The fourth section describes the evaluative part of the Database. It provides examples of the analyses that can be carried using the Database, among which an alternative re-classification of planning documents that make use of additional components, the compilation of composite indicators allowing to synthesize the information to make it easier to understand by non-technical audiences. The five section highlights the Database's limitations and the way forward.

II. Document Selection and Registration

The section describes the logic that led to the selection of the documents deemed most relevant to the evaluation of planning practices in the Arab region, as well as the way they were registered in the Database.

1. Document Selection

When assessing the quality of the planning process, it is important to differentiate between national plans and international initiatives. The Database contains information on planning practices as found in the documents that are considered by Arab governments as their vision and National Development Plans (NDP), including the ones focusing on a specific agenda, sector, or region.

Therefore, are not included

- Poverty reduction strategies, and other post-conflict needs assessment reports, or international community strategies that are put together with a view to ensure coherence with aid recipient countries' national development plans and objectives. Indeed, host governments are often involved in the process, but usually not in a systematic way. These documents are not expected to influence the design and core components of recipient countries' planning exercise although they may contribute to clarifying some aspects of the planning process.
- planning documents that are currently in use but were not readily available online. This material, although relevant to the planning process hasn't been taken into account. *Per se*, this shortcoming evidences a flaw in good planning since its accessibility motivates public agents for involvement with the planning authorities.
- documents that governments are currently using, and are available online, but haven't been explicitly and utterly referred to as relevant planning documents.
- past planning documents that are currently outdated. In the future, these documents might be included in the Database in order to enhance the understanding of the development trajectory and inherent planning deficiencies.

³ The data were used to establish stylized facts on Arab countries' experience with strategic planning. The findings can be found in a companion paper (Grand and Kamaly, 2017). The paper entitled 'On the guidelines of good planning: The case of the Arab region' can be seen as a guide to the use of the database.

Ensuring all planning documents are covered by the database will be the focus of forthcoming information compilation efforts. Each of the sample countries shall be invited to describe the main characteristics of its national and sectoral planning framework, as well as to ensure that all the relevant documents are included. These can range from long-term visions and medium-term national development plans, expenditure (or budget) frameworks, and programmes or strategies focusing on a specific sector or issue (transport, education, climate change, sustainability, public finance, etc...). Additional planning documents may be collected such as common results frameworks agreed between the government and development partners (for example, evaluating the inclusiveness of the planning process), joint government and multi-donor programmes (compact or facility) and documents which will shed light on the governments' view on how to achieve the stated goals and targets. After such consultation, the types of documents included in the database can be further expanded, if desired.

2. Document Registration

Within the Database certain data has been extracted from the national planning documents which is purely informative for the reader (table 1). These were the first data easily accessible which were included in the. This basic information includes the name of the country covered by the document, its official title and purpose, and the language in which it is published⁴; it also informs the user of the planning authority responsible for the document, and provides a hyperlink which leads either directly to the document or to an online dashboard, the availability of which is checked periodically, in order to make sure that it is always accessible.

Also in the informative part of the Database is the code of the document, which is a code assigned to each document individually and will be the only piece of informative data which will eventually play a role in the analysis of a document. It will ultimately be used, with another analytical data, in order to determine the document's level in the hierarchy. This shall be explained in greater detail in the section pertaining to analytical data. In our sheet of definitions within the database, the informative part is described as follows:

Table 1: Document Registration

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Country	Name of Arab country (at the moment ESCWA member states + Algeria)
Code of Document	Each document is assigned an individual code that reflects its national affiliation and year of issuance and distinguishes it from other documents by a letter (for example BHR2013a ⁵).
Title of document	The official title of the document
Official Purpose	The document is officially called: 1) National Vision (as well as similar alternatives reflecting the long-term development planning of a country) or 2) National (Development/Action) (Plan/strategy/Programme/Agenda) or 3) focuses on a specific agenda that covers only part of the whole economy (specific regional, sectoral, or topical issue). The alternative forms in other languages than English (French, Arabic, etc.) need to be addressed individually with caution.
Language	Language in which the document is written (when multiple translations are available, English is always preferred). EN = English, FR = French, AR = Arabic
Planning Authority	The authority in charge of the development plan

⁴ The alternative names the document might have in other languages than English (French, Arabic, etc.) have been addressed individually with caution.

⁵ BHR2013a is the abbreviation where the three letters refers to the country, the following 4 digits represents the issuing year and finally, the letter at the end represent the order of the document.

Link to document	Active hyperlink leading to the document (or alternatively a dashboard), the accessibility of which is periodically checked
Public Availability	If a document is officially referenced, but publicly unavailable, or alternatively becomes unavailable over time after it is registered in the Database, it is marked as FALSE and consulted with the planning authority of the country.
Last Accessed	Date of the last attempt to access the document's hyperlink.

Source: Authors' compilation

III. Transcriptive and Analytical Data

The section describes the two steps process that led to the reclassification of Arab planning documents using

- transcriptive data

Since throughout the region, there is no strong coherence observed between the name of a document and its content, a first step towards producing comparable information was to transcribe all data which was found inside the documents. This information pertains to their scope, structure, and, in the case that a country has more than one document, their relationship to one another.

- Analytical data

The second step towards Arab planning documents' reclassification relies on analytical information drawn out of the documents of national planning. At that stage, the Database utilises criteria for good planning which have been predefined and reflect the timespan, linkages, hierarchy and economic coverage of documents.

At the end of this section can be found the final guidelines for document's reclassification. However, the reclassification was not the main purpose of the compiled information that can also be used to carry various analysis as exemplified in a companion paper prepared by EGPS.⁶

1. Transcriptive Data

The transcribed data was divided into three groups, as follows:

a. Time Period

In order to classify documents according to the length of period they cover, it was necessary to include the data of the year the document started and ended (its life span). When transcribing the documents content into the Database, it became apparent that certain plans have discrepancies between the period stated and the actual time coverage, perhaps due to the late release of the document. Therefore, this element had to be taken into consideration, in which case it was decided to include the length of period in months, based on the release date of the document as stated in the media, if not provided officially (table 2).

Table 2: Time period

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Variable	Current Definition (DEC 2017)
Year Issued	Which year was the document published?
Period Start (years)	Which year does the plan initiate?
Period End (years)	Which year does the plan conclude?

⁶ Grand and Kamaly (2017).

Length of Period (years)	The timespan of the document (in years, including the Period Start and End years).
Month Issued	Which month was the document published? If not evident from the plan, national or international newspaper might provide the necessary information.
Period Start (months)	Which month does the plan initiate?
Period End (months)	Which month does the plan conclude?
Length of Period (months)	The timespan of the document (in months including the Period Start and End months). If the plan was released in a month after its proclaimed initiation, the release month replaces the initiation month.

Source: Authors' compilation

b. Internal structure

Planning documents, regardless of their nature, must contain basic components which make up their internal structure. These components are essential elements of the internal structure of any planning document, no matter what time span they cover, or for what purpose they are intended. The components identified are: Pillars, Objectives, Projects and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The DNP will be able to use the information pertaining to the internal structure of a document for further analysis when applicable, based on the presence or absence of one or more of this information. The collected information revealed that these components can be interlinked in various ways. Therefore, the Database records the manner the components of the document were officially linked together (table 3). In this way, the relationship between, for instance, a set of objectives and the KPIs necessary for their completion, are apparent from the Database. These components are defined as follows in the Database of National Planning:

Table 3: Internal structure

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Pillars	Explicitly transcribed chapters, topics, departments, or other pillars that divide the plan into main areas of focus
Objectives	Explicitly transcribed goals, requirements, initiatives, that help to explain HOW does the country want to achieve its strategy
Projects	Explicitly transcribed concrete projects, that are part of the whole strategy and are measurable as 1/1 or 0/1 checked (e.g., enlarge the Suez Canal). Like objectives, they can have their own KPIs linked to them.
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Explicitly transcribed quantifiable indicators of various measures (1/1, %, number, etc.)

Source: Authors' compilation

c. Level in Hierarchy

The transcriptive data further provides information which enables, in the analytical section of the Database, to classify documents according to their level in a hierarchy of national planning documents, based on their relationship to each other (table 4). At the moment, this column is analysed manually based on the transcribed references to another plan found within a document. This exercise is necessary in order to visualise a complete network of all documents within a national planning initiative and their interconnectedness.

Table 4: Level in Hierarchy

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Level in Hierarchy	The overall national planning should be structured in a clear and transparent way that allows for identifying a systematic hierarchy of individual planning documents and opens a way for an accountable implementation. This column is supposed to recognize the position of a document in the planning hierarchy of a country (0,1,2,3, etc.) based on the relation to other documents. The column utilizes Codes of Documents referred to by each document in the Reference column.
Reference	A reference is made in the document about another planning document of the country. If the referenced document is already in the database, its code is written out and divided from other references by a semi colon (;). If the referenced document isn't yet in the database, its name is written out or, if considered important, it is added to the database and assigned a Code of Document. Therefore, eventually for each country the Reference will provide a precise map of plans and their interrelations.

Source: Authors' compilation

2. Analytical Data

This section describes the second step towards Arab planning documents' reclassification. The Database utilises all information extracted from the documents in order to determine the type of the document at hand according to certain basic criteria which have been predefined and reflect the timespan, linkages, hierarchy and economic coverage of documents.

a. Classification of period

Previously, documents were classified based on their years of start and end, whereby 'short-term' covered a period of over one and up to three years, 'medium-term' covered 3 to 6 years, and 'long-term' referred to documents covering six years or more.⁷ The classification of the period covered by the document is now counted in months as there were some documents which did not have sufficient coverage, or which were planning across classifications. The decision was made with a view to refine our classification of the time span, which will enable us to give more focused recommendations at the document's milestone for elaboration of future cyclical plans, and for their timely release (table 5). The exact periods are now articulated as follows:

Table 5: Classification of Period

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Classification of Period	Short-term = 12-35 Medium-term = 36-71 Long-term = 72+

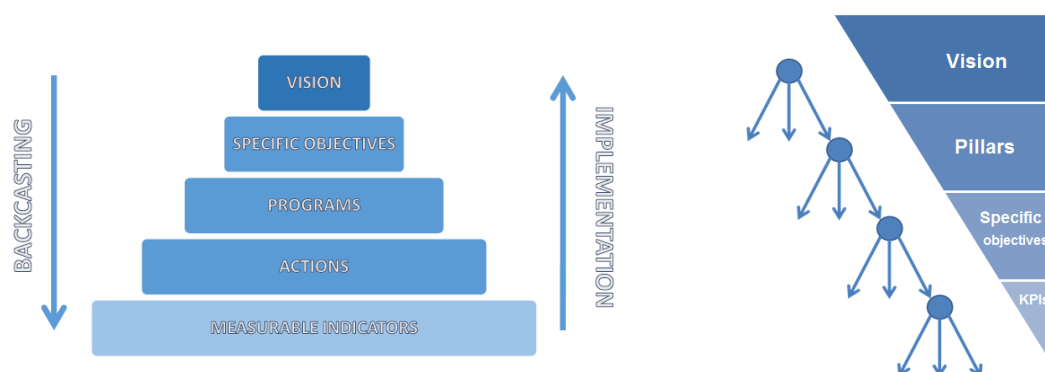
Source: Authors' classification

⁷⁷⁷ As stated in the introduction, the thresholds associated with this division is not sacred and it could be changed by the user. However, these numbers represent the conventional wisdom of timespan.

b. Linkages for a proper organization of planning components

As stated previously, every planning document, should entail an internal structure built up of pillars, objectives, and KPIs, but this is not a sufficient condition for good planning. The requirement of transparent and clearly linked hierarchy of planning documents' components is based on the methodology of the UN "Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results" (2009). Thus, when assessing planning quality, the paper considers that the individual components should be tightly linked to each other in a hierarchical order. In this case, if all the KPIs are achieved, it means the selected actions have been properly carried out, programmes have been completed, and the stated objectives reached. As a result, a broad strategy, presented in the introduction of each document will materialize (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Good practices in planning: Hierarchization of steps



Source: UNDP (2009) and authors' compilation

In its current stage, the Database simplifies the structure, suggested by UNDP, as it does not differentiate between actions and programs, since most Arab countries haven't reached this level of sophistication when drafting their planning documents. However, through analysis of the rest of the individual components of the internal structure, general conclusions can be made of their availability and linkage within the document.

c. Complete Key Performance Indicators

The cornerstone of this internal structure is therefore the fulfilment of a Key Performance Indicator (KPI). In order for the KPI to be quantifiable this has to respect certain parameters, as clearly stating the year and baseline of its initiation, its target as well as the targeted year, last but not least, the implementing authority responsible for its completion (table 6).

When it comes to complete KPIs, that possess all these prerequisites, it is possible to distinguish using the same delineation as in the case of the classification of periods, that is long-term or LT, medium-term or MT, and short-term or ST (table 7). Although certain correlations between the time periods targeted by the KPIs can be traced throughout the documents, the KPIs themselves are not systematically grouped to match the phases of the plan. Upon the selected criteria of good planning used to design the Database, the KPIs should be clearly linked through objectives to pillars, and eventually to the broad strategy which can explicitly group them into phases.

Table 6: Example of a Complete KPI with correct linkages.

Relevant Visions 2030 Objectives	Enhance the livability of Saudi cities Improve the quality of healthcare services (preventive or therapeutic)
----------------------------------	--

Strategic Objective (8)	Improve the infrastructure, facility management, and safety standards in healthcare facilities			
Key Performance Indicators	Baseline	2020 Target	Unit	Implementing Authority
Number of Licensed Medical Facilities	40	100	%	Ministry of Health

Source: NPD Saudi Arabia

Table 7: Criteria for KPIs

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Complete LT KPI	The KPI is LT and includes all required criteria to be complete (Baseline, Baseline Year, Implementing Authority) TRUE if complete; FALSE if incomplete - if no KPI
Complete MT KPI	The KPI is MT (MT KPI's Target isn't -) and includes all required criteria to be complete (Baseline, Baseline Year, Implementing Authority) TRUE if complete; FALSE if incomplete - if no KPI
Complete ST KPI	The KPI is ST (ST KPI's Target isn't -) and includes all required criteria to be complete (Baseline, Baseline Year, Implementing Authority) TRUE if complete FALSE if incomplete - if no KPI
Complete KPI	One of the Complete ST/MT/LT KPIs is TRUE TRUE if one of the Complete ST/MT/LT KPIs is TRUE FALSE if one of the Complete ST/MT/LT KPIs is FALSE - if all of the Complete ST/MT/LT KPIs is -
KPI's Linkage	The KPI is clearly linked to an Objective or Project rather than broad Pillar (or not even) that is not directly relevant to the impact of its achievement. In the case there are some measurable KPIs, but there is no linkage at all, FALSE applies. Cases with no KPIs at all are crossed out (-). The requirement of transparent and clearly linked hierarchy of goals, objectives, programs, and measuring indicators is based on the methodology of the UN "Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results" (2009). Objectives if Objective and KPI is filled or Pillar, Objective and KPI is filled Projects if Project and KPI is filled Pillars if Pillar and KPI is filled FALSE if only the KPI is filled - if the KPI is not filled

Source: Authors' compilation

d. Role in hierarchy

The internal structure, with the Broad Strategy at the helm, is not only an introduction to the plan, but can also be indicative of the plan's position in the hierarchy of planning documents. The hierarchy is created by mapping the documents with a given country's planning initiative (table 8). The association of long-, medium- and short-term KPIs, projects and objectives can be indicative of the role of the document in the hierarchy. As mentioned above, the level of a document in the hierarchy is determined by the nature of the plan, and any reference it makes to another document. Thus, every plan is given a role in the hierarchy, whereby a vision is expected to be a 'leading document', to which the NDP and 'Specific' documents are linked as 'sub document'. If the document doesn't make any reference nor have any reference to it in the rest of the planning initiative, it shall be called 'stand-alone'. In the case that a planning initiative includes both leading documents and sub documents linkage between them is essential and prevents a scenario in which different ministries pursue individual agendas which aren't interrelated.

Table 8: Role in the Hierarchy

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Role in Hierarchy	<p>The column determines the role of the document within planning hierarchy. In the best-case scenario, there is a Vision or a Mixed document that stands for a leading document (Leading Doc), while other documents are systematically linked as sub-documents (Sub-Doc). On the other hand, when the document isn't referenced by any other document and doesn't reference any other document, it is marked as Stand-alone. The alphabetical order distinguishes documents of the same role from each other.</p> <p>Stand-alone Leading Doc Sub-Doc</p>

Source: Authors' compilation

This is not to imply that the specific agendas addressing particular regional, topical or sectoral issues are not necessary, as such focused documents can allow for greater dynamism and flexibility of the planning initiative. However, to distinguish such documents from those with a general purpose, we had to create a column 'Special Purpose'.

e. Overall Sectoral Coverage

Upon carrying out this analysis, it became increasingly important to be able to distinguish between types of documents according to their scope of coverage to be able to differentiate between those which aim to cover all sectors of the economy, and those which are more specific. For this purpose, each document was subjected to a sectoral analysis based on the UN Statistics Division Internal Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC Rev. 4), and attempted to connect the complete KPIs to the sub-sectors (A-U) to which they are affiliated. Certain KPIs cover the whole economy and therefore can't be assigned a sectoral dimension. To accommodate these, a special variable called 'General Affiliation' was created through which these KPIs can be acknowledged. By deduction, the affiliation of a KPI can be either 'Sectoral' or 'General', in other words, if one is true, the other is false (table 9).

In order to find out if a document, through its KPIs and objectives, covers the whole economy, the column 'Sectoral Affiliation' was created which links these to one of the three main sectors of the

economy, either Primary, Secondary or Tertiary.⁸ Therefore, this all leads to a certain minimum ‘Overall Coverage’, which can be set at any amount of KPIs and objectives in each of the three sectors. At the moment, the threshold used is set at 5 KPIs in each sector.⁹

Table 9: Overall Sectoral Coverage

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Overall Coverage	<p>The document covers all three sectors of economy (Primary/Secondary/Tertiary) by a convincing number of objectives, projects, or KPIs. This is decided either by the column Sectoral Affiliation or General Affiliation. For the moment, the limit has been set to 5 of each Sectoral Affiliation (Primary/Secondary/Tertiary) being mentioned throughout the document, or alternatively 15 of General Affiliation (TRUE), since their general nature in this sense reduces their value to that equal to one Sectoral Affiliation.</p> <p>TRUE if Primary mentioned 5 times and Secondary mentioned 5 times and Tertiary mentioned 5 times in Sectoral Affiliation, or alternatively General Affiliation = TRUE 15 times, throughout the document</p> <p>FALSE if less than the above requirement</p>
Sectoral Affiliation	<p>The affiliation of the KPI to one or more of the general sectors (Primary, Secondary, Tertiary) based on the WB/UN Classification of All Economic Activities (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/registry/regcst.asp?Cl=27&Lg=1). Since there can be more Sectors in one cell, they are divided by a semi-column.</p> <p>Primary if at least one of the Sub-sectors A-B = TRUE Secondary if the Sub-sectors C = TRUE Tertiary if at least one of the Sub-sectors D-U = TRUE - if General Affiliation = TRUE</p>
General Affiliation	<p>The OBJ/Projs/KPI is in a general relation to the economy, and therefore cannot be assigned a specific sector, i.e. general goals for GDP, private sector, poverty, youth, women, etc.</p> <p>Similarly to the Sub-sectors A-U, this column can be filled by either TRUE or FALSE. If any Sub-sector A-U is TRUE, then its automatically FALSE and vice versa.</p>

Source: Authors' compilation

f. Type of Document

Finally, based on the combination of variables ‘Classification of Period’, ‘Special Purpose’ and ‘Overall Coverage’, a clear distinction can be made between basic types of documents. Accordingly, a vision is a document which covers a long-term period, addresses the whole economy in the sense of sectoral/general coverage, and does not have a Special Purpose. Secondly, a NDP is distinguished from a vision by its medium-term nature. ‘Specific’ represents the last possible category and where none of the aforementioned definitions is applicable (for example, Special purpose=FALSE and Classification of Period=ST), the document shall be classified as ‘Other’ (table 10).

⁸ This classification reflects the ISIC Rev.4 classification of economic activities used by the United Nations. See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/registry/regcst.asp?Cl=27>

⁹ As stated in the introduction, the thresholds associated with this division is not sacred and it could be changed by the user. However, these numbers represent the conventional wisdom of timespan.

Table 10: Type of Document

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Type of Document	<p>This column presents the original basic classification of the document. The distinction can be made between Vision, NDP, Specific, and Other based on the columns Special Purpose (SP), Overall Coverage (OC) and Classification of Period (CP).</p> <p>Vision if SP = FALSE and OC = TRUE and CP = LT NDP if SP = FALSE and OC = TRUE and CP = MT Specific if SP = TRUE Other if nothing above applies</p>

Source: Authors' compilation

IV. Evaluative Data

This section illustrates the potential of the database. The section firstly exemplifies options for composite indicators compilation by offering a 'Quality' indicator of documents that relies on the internal structure and features of a plan as described previously. Secondly, additional data pertaining to the short-term inner phase of documents as well as their linkages are introduced to the reader and a criterion to gauge the degree of the 'Sophistication' of planning approach is provided. Thirdly, an advanced reclassification of documents is put forward. Although the 'Type of Document' variable presented above is a good initial way of classifying the documents due to its simplicity and coverage of most of the documents in the region, it doesn't use the highly-textured information the database contains about the internal structure of the document, nor its inner phases. 'Inner phases' are time periods within a document, which are by nature shorter than the overall time span. Therefore, every document can only contain Phases, that are of the same or shorter Classification of Period (for example, medium-term documents can only contain medium-term or short-term phases). The advanced reclassification proposed below is more complex but more accurate.

1. Quality of Document

The 'Quality' of a document refers to the internal structure and features of a plan, depending on the basic required components of the internal structure, and their linkage as described previously. The possible classifications are: very high, high, regular, and low, and are applicable to all types of document (table 11). The classification does not represent a judgement of the document but rather attempts to link its quality with the basic criteria of internal operational planning standards described in Grand and Kamaly (2017).

Table 11: Quality of Document

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Broad Strategy	<p>The document outlines a broad long-term goal (the final impact) and attempts to answer questions such as: What are we trying to achieve? Why are we working on this problem? What is our overall goal?</p> <p>Typically, the document would have an introductory part where it states the current situation, context, reason for the planning initiative, and the broad goals that need to be achieved in a certain time.</p>

Specific Pillars	<p>The document is clearly divided into a system of Pillars (chapters/topics/areas/ministries/etc.)</p> <p>TRUE / FALSE</p>
Specific Objectives	<p>The document sets positive result or immediate result, prerequisites, short and medium-term results, required interventions, programs, or actions. It attempts to answer questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where do we want to be in five years? - What are the most immediate things we are trying to change? - What are the things that must be in place first before we can achieve our goals and have an impact? (How are we going to achieve the broad strategy?) - What are the things that need to be produced or provided through projects or programmes for us to achieve our short- to medium-term results? - What are the things that different stakeholders must provide? - What needs to be done to produce these outputs? <p>TRUE/FALSE</p>
Specific KPIs	<p>Specific KPIs = TRUE if amount of KPIs exceeds our minimum, which will be established according to an average for the region -20% (for example) in order to make this an achievable amount of KPIs for countries to aspire to. At the moment, the minimum has been set to 10 Specific KPIs.</p>
Specific KPIs Linkage	<p>The KPIs are clearly linked to Objectives or Projects rather than broad Pillars (or not even) that are not directly relevant to the impact of their achievement. In the case, there are some measurable KPIs, but there is no linkage at all, FALSE applies. Cases with no KPIs at all are crossed out (-). The requirement of transparent and clearly linked hierarchy of goals, objectives, programs, and measuring indicators is based on the methodology of the UN "Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results" (2009).</p> <p>Objectives if the majority of KPI's Linkage = Objectives Projects if the majority of KPI's Linkage = Projects Pillars if the majority of KPI's Linkage = Pillars FALSE if the majority of KPI's Linkage = FALSE - if the majority of KPI's Linkage = -</p>
Quality of Document	<p>Quality of Document is determined by the specific set up of internal characteristic features of a planning document. The basic components of a document are: Broad Strategy (BS), Specific Pillars (SP), and Specific Objectives (SO). Furthermore, a document can have Specific KPIs and in that case their Linkage to Objs, Projs, Pils, or nothing. Based on the presence and quality of these features, the final Quality of Document is presented through following Minimum Requirements:</p> <p>Very High if BS = TRUE, SP = TRUE, SO = TRUE, KPIs = TRUE, and LINK = Objs/Projs High if BS = TRUE, SP = TRUE, SO = TRUE, KPIs = TRUE, and LINK = Pils Regular if BS = TRUE, SP = TRUE, SO = TRUE Low if for all remaining documents</p>

Source: Authors' compilation

2. Degree of Sophistication

The previous category allows us to assess the structure of a document as a whole but doesn't take into account its inner organisation, namely the introduction of phases which timespan is shorter than the time coverage of the document itself. As observed, there are two approaches. Certain countries include medium-term inner phases, resembling an NDP, directly into their long-term vision. Others

produce a long-term vision and a separate NDP. In the Database, both approaches are acceptable as long as they present a proper structure and a sufficient level of detail. A long-term document with inner medium-term phases which demonstrates clear linkage of KPIs to objectives, might therefore be equivalent to a planning initiative which combines a vision with a NDP. However, in order to make these comparable, it was necessary to document and analyse the inner phases in depth, that is the degree of sophistication of the planning approach (table 12). Due to this expansion of the database, it is therefore possible to compare different planning initiatives across countries while at the same time allowing for the possibility of choice of their method. The possible qualifications of ‘Sophistication’ and the elements relating to inner phases are described below, based on an example of medium term phase.

Table 12: Degree of Sophistication

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Inner Phase(s)	Does the document contain Inner Phase(s)? This column has a summarizing character and concerns Phases of any time frame (LT/MT/ST) within a document TRUE if LT Phase or MT Phase or ST Phase = TRUE FALSE if not
MT Phase	Does the document contain medium-term Phase(s)? Doc. If the document is MT and doesn't contain MT Phase TRUE if the document contains MT Phase FALSE if the document isn't MT and doesn't contain MT Phase
MT Phase Stage	Which stage of the MT Phase(s) are we in? 1/1: There is only one Phase 1/2: First stage, two Phases...
MT Phase Span	How many years does the Phase cover? (minimum 36 months)
MT Phase Specific Objs	Does the Phase have its own Objectives? Doc. If the Phase duplicates main Objective of the document TRUE if the Objective is only related to the MT Phase FALSE if neither the Phase nor the document contain Objectives
MT Phase Specific KPIs	Does the document contain MT Phase KPIs? TRUE = more than 10 Complete MT KPIs TRUE Potential = more than 10 Complete MT KPIs FALSE FALSE = less than 10 Complete MT KPIs TRUE/FALSE
MT Phase Specific KPIs Link	What is the majority of MT Phase KPIs linked to? Objectives if linkage to Objectives dominates Projects if linkage to Projects dominates Pillars if linkage to Pillars dominates FALSE if no linkage dominates - if there are no MT KPIs

Degree of Sophistication	<p>Sophistication of a document is determined by its internal structure (i.e., the more detailed phases, the higher the Degree of Sophistication). On the other hand, even a document with None Sophistication can still be Very High Quality.</p> <p>Very High if (LT Phase = TRUE and LT KPIs Linkage = Objectives/Projects) or (MT Phase = TRUE and MT KPIs Linkage = Objectives/Projects) or (ST Phase = TRUE and ST KPIs Linkage = Objectives/Projects)</p> <p>High if (LT Phase = TRUE and LT KPIs Linkage = Pillars) or (MT Phase = TRUE and MT KPIs Linkage = Pillars) or (ST Phase = TRUE and ST KPIs Linkage = Pillars)</p> <p>Advanced if (LT Phase = TRUE and LT KPIs = TRUE) or (MT Phase = TRUE and MT KPIs = TRUE) or (ST Phase = TRUE and ST KPIs = TRUE)</p> <p>Regular if Inner Phase(s) = TRUE</p> <p>Irregular if (LT Phase = TRUE and MT Phase = FALSE and ST Phase = FALSE) or (LT Phase = Doc. and MT Phase = FALSE and ST Phase = TRUE) or (LT Phase = FALSE and MT Phase = TRUE and ST Phase = FALSE)</p> <p>None if Inner Phase(s) = FALSE</p>
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Source: Authors' compilation

3. Country groupings

Planning approaches may be influenced by country's features. In order to exemplify and facilitate the analysis of the impact of Arab countries' economic structure on their planning approaches and identify potential patterns, the database contains information about Arab countries level of development and labour/natural resource endowment that is coherent with the World Bank's (2012)).

4. Advanced Re-classification of Document

By combining the 'Quality' and 'Sophistication' with the previously described variable 'Type of Document', an advanced classification of documents can be done where the spectrum of possible types is expanded by an additional one, termed 'Mixed'. In order for a document to be mixed, it must be comparable with a fusion of the minimum requirements of a vision with those of a NDP. This classification is more precise than the previous one as it is based on additional information about the document, including their inner phases (table 13).

Table 13: Advanced Classification of Document

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
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Advanced Classification of Document	<p>This column presents an advanced classification of document for the purpose of evaluation. The distinction can be made between Mixed, Vision, NDP, and Specific based on the columns Type of Document (TP), Quality of Document (QD), and Sophistication of Document (SD). The formulas below represent the minimum requirement for a document to be classified. If the document doesn't match any of the categories, it is marked as Other.</p> <p>Mixed if TP = Vision, QD = Reg., SD = High Vision if TP = Vision, QD = Reg., SD = Reg. NDP if TP = NDP, QD = High, SD = High Specific if TP = Specific, QD = Reg. Other if nothing above applies</p>
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Source: Authors' compilation

By using this classification and typology of good planning criteria, it is possible to provide some recommendations based on 'minimum requirements':

- A 'Mixed' document should at least be a long-term (Classification of Period=LT) document which has a general purpose (Specific Purpose=FALSE), covers the whole economy (Overall Coverage=TRUE). That makes it a basic vision (Type of Document=vision). Furthermore, it should present in a clear way a broad strategy, pillars and objectives (Quality=Regular). Finally, it should include a medium-term inner phase(s), that would define specific MT KPIs and link them to objectives in an organized way (Sophistication= high).
- A 'Vision' should at least be a long-term (Classification of Period=LT) document which has a general purpose (Specific Purpose=FALSE), covers the whole economy (Overall Coverage=TRUE). That makes it a basic vision (Type of Document=vision). Furthermore, it should present in a clear way a broad strategy, pillars and objectives (Quality=Regular). Unlike the Mixed document, a vision is not required to contain inner phases (Sophistication=NONE). On the other hand, the planning initiative of a country that has such a vision should include a NDP.
- A 'NDP' should at least be a medium-term (Classification of Period=MT) document which has a general purpose (Specific Purpose=FALSE), covers the whole economy (Overall Coverage=TRUE). That makes it a basic NDP (Type of Document=NDP). Furthermore, it should present in a clear way a broad strategy, pillars, objectives and KPIs, at a manner which links them at least to Pillars (Quality=High). Similarly to a vision, a NDP can but is not required to contain inner phases (Sophistication=NONE). On the other hand, the planning initiative of a country that has such a NDP should include a Vision.

5. Additional Aspects: Sectoral approach and SDGs mapping

This final method of classification of documents is entirely sufficient for what, however the evaluative part of the Database may be further expanded in the future in order to assess the depth of the sectoral analysis. The linkage of KPIs to individual sub-sectors allows us not only to identify the number of KPIs in one sector or sub-sector, but also those which are cross-sectoral. Therefore, distinction can be made between sectoral, multi- or cross-sectoral approaches and analyse the detail of sectoral coverage as well as their interconnectedness (table 14). Worth keeping in mind that a cross-sectoral approach is one of the key prerequisites of good planning according to the UNDP "Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results" (2009).

In order for a document to have a multi-sectoral approach, it must have an in-depth analysis of more than one sector, either primary, secondary or tertiary, based on a minimum number of KPIs in each. For the moment, this number has been set at 10 KPIs. In the case of a cross-sectoral approach, the document shall demonstrate the interconnectedness of the individual sub-sectors and attempt to

make a link between them. These requirements are elaborated in the table below. This classification is applicable only to NDP.

Table 14: Multi- and Cross- Sectoral Approaches

Variable	Current Definition (December 2017)
Multi-Sectoral Approach	<p>The document includes an in-depth sectoral analysis of MORE THAN ONE Sector - Primary/Secondary/Tertiary (based on a convincing # of KPIs in each, let's say 10 for the moment). In the future, this might become an additional prerequisite for an NDP.</p> <p>TRUE if there is at least 10 Complete KPIs in each Sector (Primary/Secondary/Tertiary) = TRUE FALSE if there is less than 10 Complete KPIs in each Sector (Primary/Secondary/Tertiary) = TRUE</p>
Cross-Sectoral Approach	<p>The document takes into account the interconnectedness of individual sectors and attempts to make a link between them (f. ex., a plan focused on industry takes into account the interaction of industry with environment, education, health, social justice, etc.). Cross-sectoral approach is one of the key prerequisites of good planning according to the UNDP Handbook (2009).</p> <p>TRUE if 10 or more Cross-Sectoral KPIs = TRUE FALSE if less than 10 Cross-Sectoral KPIs = TRUE</p>
Cross-Sectoral KPI	<p>The KPI takes into account the interconnectedness of individual sectors and attempts to make a link between them (f. ex., a KPI focused on industry takes into account the interaction of industry with environment, education, health, social justice, etc.).</p> <p>TRUE if more than 1 of the Sub-sectors (A, B, C, D, ...) = TRUE FALSE if 0 or only 1 of the Sub-sectors (A, B, C, D, ...) = TRUE</p>

Source: Authors' compilation

The database further allows to identifying the linkage of KPIs to individual Sustainable Development Goals. Two approaches have been envisioned. The first one is a mapping of the SDGs throughout the documents by matching the KPIs with the SDGs indicators, which is similar to what has been attempted by Jeffrey Sachs, for example, in order to put the plans on the right path for the achievement of the Agenda 2030. The Database is currently being updated to allow for this mapping. Another option is to spot the KPIs that tackle different issues. For example, the Database allows to track the gener dimension in the planning documents. Data can be found in the Database.

V. Database Limitations and Way Forward

The aforementioned methodology allowed development of a comprehensive dynamic structure with the ability to compare and analyse individual national development planning initiatives in the region. In its current form, the internal nature of the database provides a first response to the needs of policymakers, researchers and the private sector for better information on planning practices in the Arab region. Future plan involves upgrading the tool currently built in Excel, into a sophisticated online interface to allow for more interactive tool for evidence-based strategic and integrative planning.

The relationships described in the paper can be summarized and clearly visualized through the means of network analysis (see Annex 1: DNP Network Methodology Analysis). Apart from summarizing our methodology, it also demonstrates the difference between variables that are inputted manually as

opposed to being automatically generated. Where applicable, attempt was made to codify these conditions in order to eliminate the potential for human error. between individual variables in the Network Methodology.

It is important to summarize and clarify what the Database does not (yet) cover. First, it is considered as the first phase of a more comprehensive project to support the process of planning in the Arab region. Second, it contains 78 national planning documents in the Arab region, unevenly distributed among the 17 member states and Algeria, of which four are publicly inaccessible and two are outdated. Third, the database does not tackle the issue of good planning in full as most of the variables (fields) are descriptive involving minimal value judgement. Fourth, the database does not take into consideration the implementation of the plan aspect of the plan whether *de jure* or *de facto*. These limitations do not affect cross-country comparisons though, nor the conclusion of the analyses carried below or the stylized-facts that may be obtained.

As a part of a broad project that attempts to improve the national development planning in the Arab region, a new tool of analytical and comparative nature has been presented within this paper. At its current stage, the Database of National Planning allows for combining various individual indicators to compute synthetic initial indicators of good planning. This approach may provide guidance for the countries to accommodate their planning initiatives to the best international practices of good planning and facilitate the discussion with stakeholders. On the other hand, the methodology presented attempts to reflect on the vast differences among individual countries and allow as much possible for a choice in the process of upgrading their development plans.

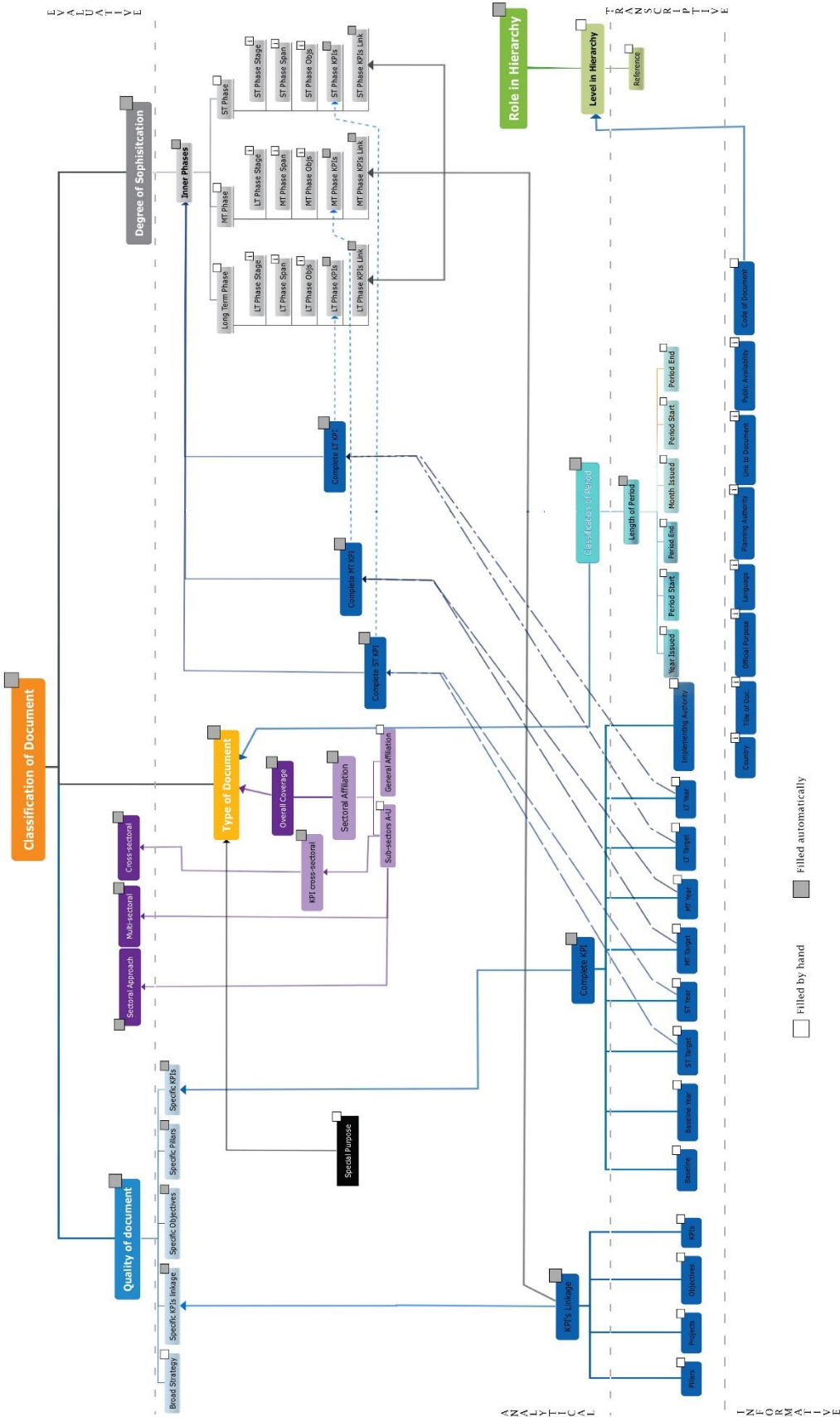
With the help of this tool, ESCWA aims at improving member states' capacity to plan effectively and to enhance their course of development. Close observance of the recommendations that can be provided following the monitoring and evaluation of medium- and short-term plans will allow countries to adjust their future medium-term development initiatives to bring them in line with the achievement of international agendas. In less than 13 years, Arab countries will assess their success or shortcomings in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the Agenda 2030 can only be reached by full comprehension of the complicated nature of development and taking actions towards their fulfilment. In this sense, the Database of National Planning provides the first technical and practical step towards the integration of planning for sustainable economic and human development.

References

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Annex 1:

Database of National Planning: Network Methodology Analysis



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