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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Inequality in the SDGs

Fighting Multidimensional Inequality in the Arab Region



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"When I hear people say a rising tide lifts all boats, I say wait a minute. People are in different boats – one is going upstream and the other downstream. And the answer is not about getting people to paddle harder. It's about putting people in the same river".

Dr. Amani Nuru-River
UC Berkeley School of Public Health
June 8, 2016

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 accompanying targets to be met in a fifteen-year timeframe to transform the lives of all people on the planet.¹ The SDGs have superseded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and are widely perceived as universal, indivisible and people-centered. Like the MDGs, the SDGs balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e. social, economic, and environmental. Concomitantly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the immense challenge that inequality poses to the achievement of the SDGs and commits to bridge the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" and to reduce the growing disparities in opportunity, wealth and power to achieve sustainable development.

to reach out to all people irrespective of their socio-economic, political and cultural differences. Fighting inequality is thus part and parcel of this mission to ensure that all people equally benefit from the package of rights and opportunities that the SDGs offer. Inequality, which features in a standalone Goal (goal 10) in the SDGs, constitutes one of the key features of the 2030 Agenda and a crosscutting issue that intersects with and feeds into the achievement of the 16 remaining SDGs. This was demonstrated by Le Blanc who showed the intersecting relationship between SDG 10 with the remaining 16 Goals" related targets, each at varying levels of interconnectedness. Le Blanc highlighted the necessity of having peaceful societies and good governance along with good economic policies for the reduction of poverty and the fight against substantial inequalities.²

The commitment to "leave no one behind" is at the core of the SDGs and of the overarching goal

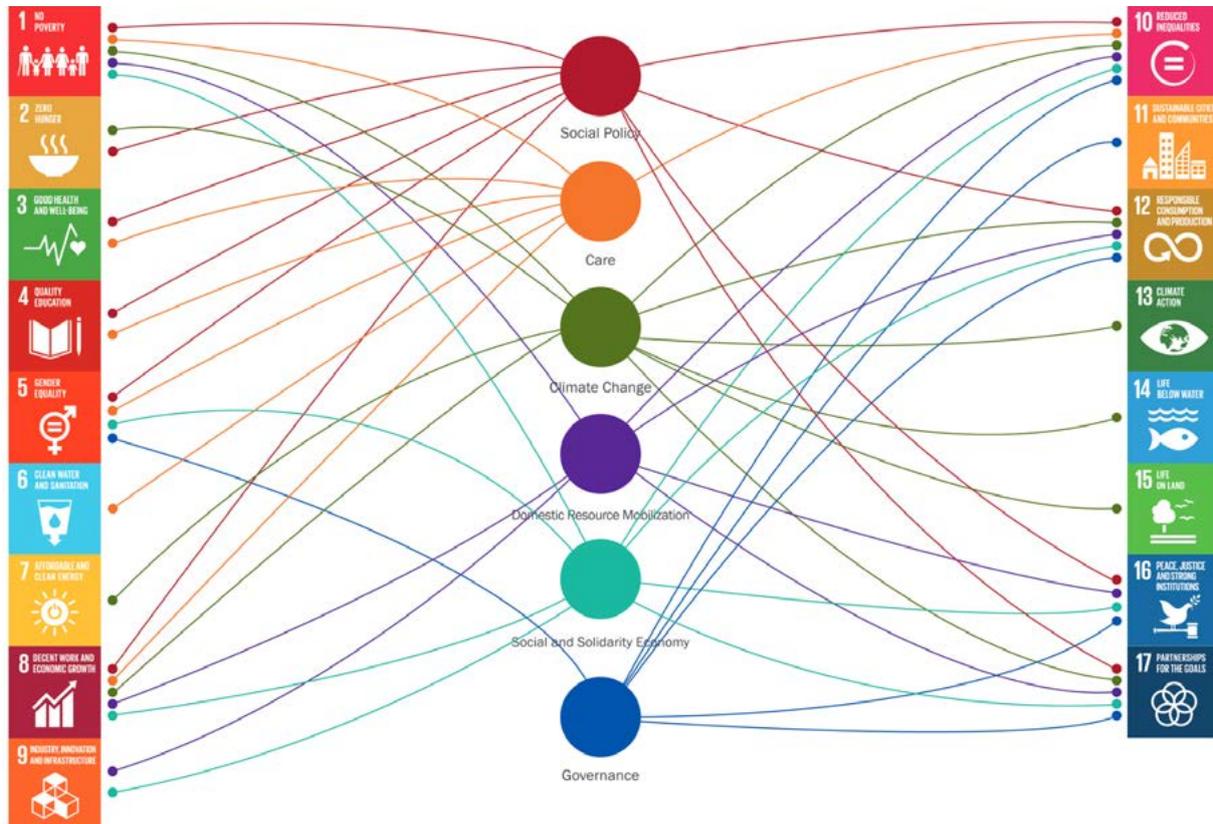
Furthermore, fighting inequality was identified by the UN Secretary General as one of the

Figure 1. The Intersecting aspect of Inequality in the SDGs



Source: UN-DESA, 2016, "Policy Integration and the 2030 Agenda: Policy Tools and Approaches to Tackle Inequality", Policy Coordination Branch - Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, UNDESA. Available at: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/publication/desa-policy-brief-inequality.pdf>.

Figure 2. Mapping policy areas for transformative change. UNRISD Flagship Report and the SDGs



Source: UNRISD, 2016. Overview of UNRISD 2016 flagship publication on “Policy Innovations for Transformative Change: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, p.9. Available at: [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B42004CCC77/\(httpInfoFiles\)/60FCBDD8C641F3D2C125804F0032FFDF/\\$file/Flagship2016_Overview.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B42004CCC77/(httpInfoFiles)/60FCBDD8C641F3D2C125804F0032FFDF/$file/Flagship2016_Overview.pdf).

six essential elements that help reinforce the application of the sustainable development agenda at the global, regional and country levels.³ These are essential to end persisting poverty, fight inequality and ensure a strong and transformative economy, while promoting safe and peaceful societies and strong governmental institutions, and ensuring healthy lives and broad-based knowledge with the full participation and inclusion of all societal groups.

Advancing the attainment of these six essential elements of the SDGs, is considered incremental to ensure that the agenda 2030 and its extended 17 global goals will deliver on its transformative promise and to ensure substantial change at the social, economic and environmental levels of each nation. A change that is only possible through the close interlinkage and connectedness of the 17 global goals, including SDG 10 at their center. UNRISD's recently launched

flagship publication on Policy Innovations for Transformative Change attempts to gather and interlink the sustainable development goals within main thematic areas across the three dimensions of sustainable development and which are considered to have "the greatest transformative potential".⁴ These revolve around social policy, care policies, climate change and sustainability, domestic resource mobilization, social and solidarity economy (SSE), and governance, all of which feed into goal 10 of the SDGs, making it the most multi-dimensional goal (see figure 2 above).

What is inequality? Why is it bad for the people and for the countries' welfare? How is it most commonly measured? And how is it manifested in the Arab region? These are some of the questions to be addressed in this brief, supported by a number of policy recommendations put forward to both policy-makers and civil society organizations.

I. What is Inequality?

The concepts of inequality, absolute poverty and relative poverty are sometimes used interchangeably. Different from absolute and relative poverty, inequality is associated with the concepts of discrimination, unfairness and disparities in treatment and access to goods and services that would eventually hinder people's fair access to their basic rights and opportunities. As such, addressing inequality means taking necessary economic, social, political and environmental actions to ensure that all people are equally treated and enjoy equal freedoms and are guaranteed equal distribution of goods, services and opportunities, without any form of discrimination and irrespective of their color, race, religion, language, sex, age, opinions, political affiliations, social origins, and even geographical representation.⁵ This is crucial in order to reach to a level of equality where "no one is left behind" and where every person can exercise freely and effectively his/her civic, political, social, economic, environmental and cultural rights.

However, while the common definition of inequality refers to the disparities in income and expenditure existing between different segments of society (see Box 1), inequality is no longer perceived solely in economic terms in the current global development agenda, as it has expanded to cover the social, political and geographic disparities that have been the sources of grievances of people for decades.

II. Inequality is Bad for the People and for the Countries' Welfare

Inequality is perceived in different ways. Whether it is examined at the horizontal or vertical levels, in economic, social or political terms, or analyzed between regions, local areas, or groups of people, or even framed within levels of outcome, opportunity and autonomy (see Box 2), inequality has been confirmed in literature as being harmful for economies and societies. It is also regarded as a global risk that requires combined efforts of all stakeholders and a wide range of reformed policies.

Inequality is particularly bad for vulnerable groups and the poor, as it negatively affects the productivity of the country, distorts the economy, limits growth, and threatens the stability of the country by dismantling the functioning of its institutions and hampering the well-being of people⁶. Also, while it is sometimes argued that income inequality does not matter when poverty rates are minimal, empirical studies show a significant causal relationship between high levels of income inequality and an increase in poverty levels and in social problems with negative repercussions on people at all levels.⁷ The latter are translated in "increased status competition and stress" accompanied by negative health and social outcomes such as rising crime, increased mental health problems, drug abuse, increased levels of violence and reductions in life expectancy, educational performance, and social mobility.⁸

Box 1. Types of Economic Inequality

According to literature, there are three main types of economic inequality:

1. **Income Inequality**, which is the extent to which income is unevenly distributed among the people, where income refers to the money flowing in from any formal or informal employment, investment, savings, state benefits, pensions and rent;
2. **Pay (wage) inequality**, which refers to payments made from employment only and includes bonuses where applicable. It reveals the difference in remuneration between people within same company or across all pay received in a specific country; and
3. **Wealth inequality**, which refers to the inequality of distribution of the total amount of assets of an individual or a household.

Source: <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/how-economic-inequality-defined>.

Moreover, inequality adversely affects the economic prosperity and stability of a nation, as increased levels of inequality threaten economic growth and prevent its sustainability, and hinder serious attempts to reduce poverty⁹. In addition, unequal societies tend to grow more slowly than those with lower levels of inequality.¹⁰ Concurrently, inequality distorts the link between civil society, solidarity, social justice, human rights and democracy, as it hampers the process of consensus building on issues that affect people and lead to crime, political unrest and structural violence that provoke long-standing conflicts.¹¹ This is particularly relevant to the Arab uprisings that swept the region in 2011-2012, and were triggered by high levels of "perceived" inequality, including income inequality and socio-economic disparities and discrimination practiced against certain societal groups based on their confession or ethnicity.¹² In Egypt, for example, social inequality and the absence of political reforms in addition to poor human development performance were among the main factors that caused the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution.¹³

In the Arab region, a major challenge to the fight against inequality is corruption, which is caused by the lack of "strong enforcement mechanisms for anti-corruption laws"¹⁴ among other reasons. In the 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, several Arab countries ranked amongst the twenty most corrupt countries in the world and the MENA region¹⁵. Empirical evidence has shown that corruption not only affects economic efficiency and the effectiveness of social spending but also increases income inequality and poverty.¹⁶ The literature indicates that corruption harms the poor in different ways and worsens income inequality in varying degrees, as it has implications on the level and efficiency of private investment and public spending and ultimately affects economic growth and development.¹⁷ For instance, biased taxation systems favor the rich and those in power, and social programs tend to be poorly targeted since corrupt public officials divert public resources to their own benefits instead of investing them in social services for the poor, and wealthy groups tend to lobby for policies that perpetuate asset inequality.

Box 2. The Different Levels of Equality

- 1. Equality of Outcome:** It refers to results and to the equality in what individuals achieve. For example, it refers to the level of income or the level of educational attainment in the areas of employment and education respectively;
- 2. Equality of Opportunity:** This concept is about leveling the playing field so that all groups benefit from socio-economic and political advantages in a fair manner. In the area of employment for example, it refers to equality in accessing employment opportunities. In other words, it is about treating people equally on the basis of their differences, which is closely related to the notion of equity.
- 3. Equality of autonomy:** It relates to the degree of empowerment or voice that individuals or societal groups possess, which enable them to influence their lives and achieve their full potential in life.

Source: The Equality and Human Rights Commission, *The Equality Measurement Framework*, accessed at <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/our-work/key-projects/equality-measurement-framework>.

III. Inequality: How is it Most Commonly Measured?

Measuring inequality is not as straightforward as it may seem. While the common trend for measuring economic inequality is through the Gini coefficient, the latter can be criticized for focusing on income inequality and for being unable to measure "horizontal" inequalities and disparities between classes, gender and ethnic and religious groups across different dimensions. The three commonly used measures of inequality are the following:

- 1. The Gini coefficient** of inequality, which is the most popular and commonly used measure of inequality. This coefficient varies between 0 and 1, whereby 0 represents absolute equality whereas 1 indicates complete inequality. This entails that a coefficient close to one indicates that very few people possess most of the country's income;

2. **The Palma ratio** measures income inequality by comparing the ratio of the income share of the top 10% relative to the poorest 40% of population; and
3. **The Quintile ratio:** It reflects the ratio of the total income received by the 20% of the population with the highest income (top quintile) compared to that received by the 20% of the population with the lowest income (lowest quintile). This measure captures the income variations within a country.

The **Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index/ HDI** is another commonly used measure of inequality that can also provide a more complete picture of

inequality than the Gini coefficient. It accounts for inequality in its measurement of human development across its three dimensions of long and healthy life (inequality-adjusted life expectancy index), knowledge (inequality-adjusted education index) and decent standard of living (inequality-adjusted income index). Table 1 below shows that the Gini coefficients in selected Arab countries vary from 0.29 (more equal) to 0.64 (more unequal). However, as Table 1 also shows, Gini-measured inequality cannot always be reconciled with inequality-adjusted HDI values. For example, while the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen had relatively low Gini coefficients between 2005 and 2013, they also had relatively low levels of inequality-adjusted HDI in 2014¹⁸.

Table 1. HDI, Inequality-adjusted HDI and the GINI coefficient of Arab countries

Country	HDI Value (2014)	Inequality-adjusted HDI (2014)	GINI Coefficient (2005-2013)
Qatar	0.850	..	..
Saudi Arabia	0.837	..	..
United Arab Emirates	0.835	..	..
Bahrain	0.824	..	..
Kuwait	0.816	..	..
Oman	0.793	..	..
Lebanon	0.769	0.609	..
Jordan	0.748	0.625	0.33
Algeria	0.736	..	..
Libya	0.724	..	..
Tunisia	0.721	0.562	0.35
Egypt	0.690	0.524	0.30
Palestine	0.677	0.577	0.34
Iraq	0.654	0.512	0.29
Morocco	0.628	0.441	0.40
Syrian Arab Republic	0.594	0.468	0.35
Mauritania	0.506	0.337	0.40
Comoros	0.503	0.268	0.64
Yemen	0.498	0.329	0.35
Sudan	0.479	..	0.35

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report, 2015, Statistical Annex. Available from: <http://report.hdr.undp.org/>.

The relatively low levels of inequality in several Arab countries – as measured by the Gini coefficient – can be attributed to the post-independence development model adopted in these countries that yielded considerable equitable economic outcomes¹⁹. However, such measurements of income inequality tend to mask wide rural-urban divides, and the exclusion of certain social groups, such as women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, and other minorities. Inequality cannot thus be solely viewed in economic terms. It should be measured more comprehensively and recognized as a multi-dimensional challenge to the attainment of the SDGs, as it relates to people's deprivations from different life opportunities, and is connected to the human, economic, civic, political and social exclusion and disparities between different social groups.²⁰

IV. The Different Facets of Inequality in the Arab Region

The Arab region is mired in a number of structural challenges that are exacerbated by ongoing conflicts, socio-economic disparities and lost opportunities. These challenges will pose

significant obstacles to the attainment of the SDGs, if they are not strategically addressed by member countries. The following section will examine some of the different trends and facets of inequality in the Arab region, and the population groups that are mostly affected.

A. The Economic, Social and Spatial Dimensions of Inequality in the Arab countries

A study undertaken by UNDP on "Perspectives on Inequality Challenges in the Arab region" shows that the region faces stark disparities in economic development and human development alike.²¹ At the economic level, data shows considerable disparities in per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries on the one hand, and most Arab least developed countries on the other hand. For example, the GDP per capita reached a level of \$74,667 in 2015 for Qatar compared to a level as low as \$2,090 in the Sudan (see Table 2). However, although the GCC countries were identified as the most economically advanced and the best achievers of the Millennium Development Goals, some of these countries have displayed significant sub-national inequalities on different socio-economic dimensions in addition to gender equality deficits.²²

Table 2. Comparison of GDP per capita between Arab countries, 2015

Arab countries with highest GDP per Capita, 2015		Arab countries with lowest GDP per capita, 2015	
Country	GDP per capita	Country	GDP per capita
Qatar	\$74,667.2	Sudan	\$2,089.4
United Arab Emirates	\$40,438.4	Palestine	\$2,866.8
Kuwait	\$28,984.6	Morocco	\$2,871.5
Bahrain	\$23,395.7	Egypt	\$3,614.7
Saudi Arabia	\$20,481.7	Tunisia	\$3,872.5
Oman	\$15,645.1	Algeria	\$4,206.0
		Iraq	\$4,629.1
		Libya	\$4,643.3
		Jordan	\$4,940.0
		Lebanon	\$8,050.8

Source: World Bank Data. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?view=chart>.

Despite great strides in development indicators in the region, a growing body of research shows that these gains mask sharp inequalities and disparities in education and health sectors across Arab countries on the one hand, and between rural and urban areas within these countries on the other hand²³. To better illustrate this, health inequalities persist across and between countries of the region with women and the rural poor being mostly affected due to conservative traditions and poor infrastructure, among other reasons.²⁴ Similarly, at the educational level, while the region has made significant progress in net primary education enrolment rates (92 % in 2011), inequalities in education opportunities have increased in several Arab countries due to armed conflicts among other social and cultural norms.²⁵ For instance, while Oman and Morocco stood out with a substantial increase of their net primary education enrolment rates (from 80% to 98% between 1999 and 2009 for Oman, and 71% to 96% between 1999 and 2011 for Morocco), other Arab countries (such as the Syrian Arab Republic, Palestine, Iraq and Jordan) faced a sharp decrease in their net enrolment rates.²⁶

Education deficits are also marked by regional inequalities. An analysis of 28 household surveys in 12 Arab countries found moderate levels of inequality between metropolitan and urban areas and non-metropolitan rural areas in terms of welfare distribution, whereby urban households turned out to be more fortunate than their rural counterparts as they enjoy better endowments and opportunities.²⁷ Furthermore, according to the 2013 Arab MDGs report, rural households are 3.5 times more likely to suffer from multidimensional deprivations compared to urban households.²⁸ In Egypt for example, where only 43% of the population is urban, poverty rates are almost double in rural areas (32%) than in urban areas (15%); and secondary school completion rates are lower in rural areas (70%), compared to urban areas (81%).²⁹ Also sharp inequalities in the distribution of land and in land ownership remain a major cause for poverty in many developing countries, including those in the Arab world, and the rural landless population are amongst the poorest. Even when the poor have access to land, they often lack secure and marketable land rights that would allow them to make long-term investments in land, improve productivity, and accumulate wealth.

B. Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is an important characteristic of the Arab region, where women continue to suffer from discriminatory practices and laws and face different forms of inequalities in their access to services, to the labour market, to economic assets as well as in their participation in political life. Economically, the Arab region continues to score low on female labour participation despite considerable advancement in educational achievements, as women only constitute 24% of the total labour force participation rate in the Arab world compared for example to 61% in East Asia and Pacific and 51% in Europe and Central Asia.³⁰ Disparities in women's labour force participation rate also exist within the Arab region, whereby they reached in 2016 a rate of 53% in Qatar compared to 12% and 14% in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan respectively (see table 3 below).

Table 3. Percentage of Female Labor Force Participation in ESCWA member countries, age group 15+

Country	2016
Bahrain	39
Egypt	23
Iraq	15
Jordan	14
Kuwait	48
Lebanon	24
Libya	28
Mauritania	29
Morocco	25
Oman	30
Qatar	53
Saudi Arabia	20
Sudan	24
Syrian Arab Republic	12
Tunisia	25
United Arab Emirates	42
Palestine	18
Yemen	26

Created from: ILO Key Indicators of the Labor Market – 9th edition; Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (ILO estimate). Available from: <http://kilm.ilo.org/2015/install/>.



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Recent ILO statistics also show that gender gaps in labor force participation in the Arab region are among the largest in the world although the labor force participation gap decreased by 4.6 percentage points between 1995 and 2015.³¹ Politically, Arab women are still underrepresented in political positions and decision-making processes, as they only constitute 18.4% of the total number of parliamentarians in the Arab States, compared to 19.2% in Asia, 23.1% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and ideally 41.1% in Nordic countries for example.³² More specifically, and as of January 2017, only 3.1% of the parliamentary seats are occupied by women in both Lebanon and Kuwait, whereas in Qatar and Yemen there is no representation of women in the national parliament³³. Legally, while most Arab constitutions guarantee equal civic rights and affirm the principle of equality and access to justice to all citizens, in many Arab countries, women suffer from unequal and unjust treatment before the law and are under-represented in the legal and judicial system.³⁴ These are clearly demonstrated in the discriminatory personal status codes in most Arab countries that marginalize and discriminate against

women in situations of marriage, adultery, custody, divorce and guardianship.³⁵ Also social security policies and taxation laws have proven to be unfavorable to women in most Arab countries. This is the case for example of Jordan's Social Security Law (No. 1/2014) that forbids remarried women, but not remarried husbands, from receiving the indemnities of their deceased husbands.³⁶

C. Inequality among Selected Social Groups

Most studies on inequality link social exclusion, discrimination and the inability of certain groups to access public services and other productive assets, to high levels of inequality that often trap these groups into severe poverty and lower capabilities, and exclude them from the decision-making processes. Persons with Disabilities for example, are one socially and economically marginalized group in the Arab region that tend to be deprived of equal access to education and employment opportunities and suffer from inequitable treatment both at the societal and household levels. It is estimated that only one-



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third of persons with disabilities in the Arab region are employed, and their literacy rate is four to five times lower compared to the total Arab population.³⁷ The elderly do not fare any better in the region given the absence of accessible social protection schemes, the lack of adequate laws and legislation that protect elderly rights, and the lack of political will to include their needs and priorities in national agendas.³⁸ Youth are another marginalized group in the Arab region that still suffer from limited access to the labor market, to health services (particularly the rural youth) and to political life, whereby they only constitute 7% of the total parliamentary seats in Bahrain and Lebanon and only four countries possess specialized youth-related legislative committees (Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Yemen).³⁹ According to ILO's recent figures, regional "youth unemployment was the highest in the Middle East and North Africa in 2014", as it stood at 28.2 % and 30.5 % respectively.⁴⁰ High rates of youth unemployment have been correlated with the popular protests that swept the region back in late 2010, and have been identified by the 2016 World Youth Report as an influential factor to the increased susceptibility of young people to extremism and radicalization.⁴¹ Concurrently, despite some positive strides in the areas of migrants' rights and inclusion in many

Arab countries, migrants and refugees in the Arab region still face major socio-economic and political deprivations as they are denied equal treatment and fair access to goods and services and are being denied access to social protection systems.⁴²

Children also suffer from discriminatory actions, arbitrary measures and unequal opportunities in the Arab region, which put them at an even greater disadvantage considering their critical vulnerability. Early marriage, female genital mutilation, forced child labor and exploitation, and sexual abuse are some types of children's abuses and children rights' violations in the Arab region.⁴³ In addition, school drop-outs, poor healthcare services, and forced recruitment of child soldiers further increases the vulnerability of Arab children amidst lax government regulations and legislations to protect them from such flagrant violations, or even their inability or unwillingness to adequately protect them⁴⁴.

Moreover, the various conflicts raging in the Middle East and notably in the Syrian Arab Republic, have generated an unprecedented refugee crisis, of which women are particularly the victims. Such a crisis is engendering significant humanitarian emergencies, specifically to women and children who bear the brunt of the war's horrors as they have been subject to sexual abuse, exploitation, violence and assault of all kinds, by refugees and smugglers alike⁴⁵. This crisis is also generating a new underclass of impoverished and excluded citizens, jeopardizing the future of generations, and increasing the risk of deepening inequalities, specifically in countries with the highest refugee ratio per capita, as well as increasing the risk of radicalization.

D. Inequality in ICTs: A Double Digital Divide in the Arab region

Inequality is also manifested in people's unequal access to ICTs, which is referred to as "digital divide"⁴⁶ that further affects social inequality and exclusion. The United Nations Task Force on Innovation, Science and Technology argued in 2005 that the growing gap between "people with access to local and global networks and people without such access is widening"⁴⁷, which leads to bypassing a large proportion of the world's

Table 4. ICT Development Index Values in selected Arab countries, 2015

Country	World's Rank 2015 (total of 167 mapped countries)	IDI 2015 value
Bahrain	27	7.63
Qatar	31	7.44
UAE	32	7.32
Saudi Arabia	41	7.05
Kuwait	46	6.83
Oman	54	6.33
Lebanon	56	6.29
Jordan	92	4.75
Tunisia	93	4.73
Morocco	99	4.47
Egypt	100	4.40
Syrian Arab Republic	117	3.48
Sudan	126	2.93
Mauritania	150	2.07

Source: ITU, 2015 Global ICT Development Index.

population and leaving the poor behind. The Arab region, in particular, suffers from "a double digital divide", namely between rich Gulf countries that have high access to ICTs and many other Arab countries (the first divide), and between the Arab countries and the rest of the world (the second divide).⁴⁸ For example, the percentage of individuals using the internet in the Arab states amounted to 37% of the total population in 2015 compared to 77.4% in Europe, whereas the mobile broadband subscriptions amounted to 40.6% in the Arab States compared to 78.2% in Europe and 77.6% in the Americas in 2015.⁴⁹ Within the Arab region, the ICT Development Index (IDI)⁵⁰ differs substantially between the Arab countries themselves, as it reached 7.63 points for Bahrain with a world's ranking of 27 in 2015, compared to only 2.07 in Mauritania (see Table 4 above).⁵¹

Also, when examining the digital divide in relation to particular socio-economic groups within societies, significant differences and inequalities in the levels of access to, and use of ICTs, exist between men and women (so-called "gender digital divide"), between those with more or less income, and between those with higher or lower

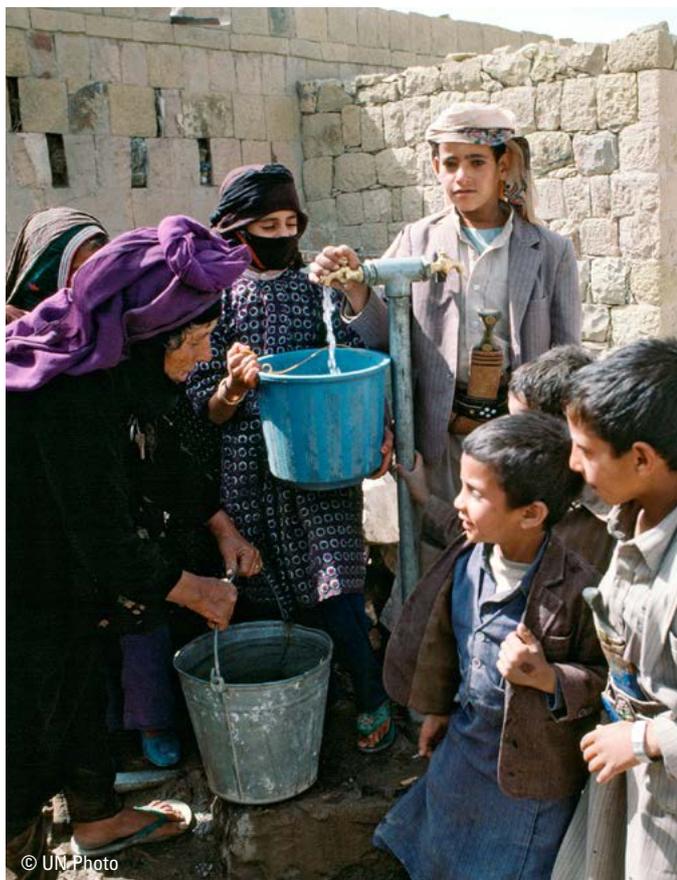
educational attainment. These are associated with ICT affordability, as well as with the capabilities and acquired skills required for Internet use, in addition to other factors that prevent the traditionally excluded and marginalized social groups, such as persons with disabilities, to access ICTs.⁵²

E. The Environmental dimension of Inequality

"We are living through a change of era. The world must change its unsustainable development model in an adverse global, regional and national context. Inertial development, 'business as usual,' is no longer a viable option for the world,"

Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC
(at the first meeting of the High Level Political Forum,
New York, July 2016)

Inequality is also evidenced in the environmental field and natural resource use. In fact, it is widely



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recognized that climate change affects different social groups in various ways, as few social groups have less power and less access to and control over available resources and assets. A recent publication by UN-DESA shows that low-income countries usually endure the most of the environmental hazards' effects, and climate change disproportionately affects communities, which is likely to cause an increase in poverty and aggravate inequalities.⁵³ Many of those factors can challenge the achievement of the SDGs since the effects of climate change are "likely to slow down economic growth, and exacerbate food insecurity, health problems and heat stress of the most vulnerable populations".⁵⁴ This implies that those with the least resources are more likely to be fiercely affected by the crippling effect of climate change than those with better social and economic advantages. In fact, the degradation of natural resources, the excessive exploitation of fragile ecosystems, and climate change will altogether negatively affect the productivity of the lands upon which many poor households rely to

ensure their survival. This raises ethical concerns since the poor are generally the least contributors to the causes of global climate change, namely the emission of greenhouse gases, while they are the most affected by climate change and the least able to combat its impacts because of their lack of resources.⁵⁵ At the same time, environmental inequality will not only undermine the wellbeing of current generations but also that of future generations because poverty and inequality can be transmitted from parents to children. Hence, both ethical and intergenerational concerns become important drivers for the current generation to act in a way to ensure a fair distribution of the intergenerational effects of climate change and protect the welfare and rights of future generations. This can be achieved by adopting low Green-House Gas emission technologies, changing consumption patterns, investing in renewable energy and basic social services.

V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is now widespread agreement that inequality constitutes a significant obstacle to poverty reduction and to the attainment of the SDGs if targeted policies and plans are not put into place, and if proper mechanisms and tools are not made available to all countries. From the outset, equality will only flourish within an enabling environment that promotes genuine participation and social inclusion of all people, an environment where an equitable distribution of power is balanced and where social solidarity is nurtured and safeguarded. As such, Arab countries are invited to tackle inequality systematically and address its significant socio-economic and political dimensions. What follows are some recommendations intended for governments, policymakers and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to fight multidimensional inequality in the Arab region:

- Innovative policies that are grounded in evidence-based information and data and steered by the principles of social justice, i.e. equality, participation, human rights and equity, need to be formulated and implemented through effective public-private-civic partnerships and fundamental



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institutional reforms. Reforms of markets and government institutions, along with reformed policies that serve the interest of the poor and are responsive to the most disadvantaged are also crucial to "redress asset inequalities, by fostering accumulation of (physical and human) assets by poor people".⁵⁶ In addition, targeted tax and redistribution policies, and better access to quality education and social services are equally needed to reduce inequality. This requires Governments to ensure a fair and impartial distribution of material and non-material resources and opportunities by removing barriers that "hinder certain individuals and groups (such as women, people with disabilities, and the poor) from fulfilling their potential".⁵⁷ It also requires them to reconsider their traditional assistance-oriented social protection schemes, which "leave many behind" and move towards the universalization of the social protection rights for all, especially in times of increased conflicts and wars.

- Governments are called to examine and consider the underlying factors that prevent the poor from reaping the benefits of economic growth, and identify the appropriate and effective policies that serve both goals of promoting economic growth and rapidly reducing poverty.⁵⁸ This entails developing and implementing targeted programs known as "poor-area programs" as well as setting up "growth poles" in tandem with increased investment in infrastructure as a means to reversing the losses in inequality patterns and contributing to sustained equality.⁵⁹
- Local governments can play a crucial role in the achievement of the SDGs and in creating an enabling environment for genuine participation and social inclusion at the local level, which contributes to the achievement of SDG10. As such, local governments should ensure a fully equitable and non-discriminatory provision of public services, and the allocation of local budgets to income-generating activities and

other initiatives that boost employment and improve the income of the poorest households. This is in addition to engaging minority groups in particular types of jobs such as public service employment.

- Fighting social discrimination and inequality also requires increased awareness on social inclusion and equality concepts across different spheres. Civil society organizations are invited to organize public awareness campaigns to increase understanding of equality and non-discriminatory treatment and ensure a degree of empowerment among the previously disadvantaged groups. The Law No. 2 of 2015 against Discrimination and Hatred (the "Law") issued on 15 July 2015 by the UAE government is an example of such actions, as it prohibits all forms of discrimination on the basis of religion, belief, sect, faith, creed, race, color or ethnic origin.⁶⁰
- To fight environmental inequality, proper adaptation and mitigation measures are to be adopted by Arab governments and advocated by CSOs in order to increase poor people's resilience to climate change implications and decrease the crippling and irreversible effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Also, governments and CSOs need to galvanize their efforts to find practical solutions to accelerate progress towards the SDGs while protecting the rights of future generations and reducing the detrimental effects of the present actions and policies on future generations.
- SDG 9 on "Infrastructure, Industrialization and Innovation" glaringly refers to the provision of equal and universal access to the Internet and other information and communication technologies as a means to achieve change in the world (target 9.c.). As such, governments in the Arab developing and Least Developed Countries are called upon to monitor the use of ICTs and establish evidence-based approaches to closing the digital divide and providing broadband for all, including the most vulnerable. This includes exploiting strategic and innovative use of ICT in development policies and programs, and adopting measures to maximize the accessibility,

affordability and use of ICTs in all countries and by all people.⁶¹

- Addressing the problem of inequality measurement and the lack of data in this field is instrumental in order to reach out to credible and valid data that would better inform decisions aiming to advance equality across all spheres and at both national and regional levels. Governments are therefore called upon to invest more in research and development and to improve data processes, particularly the gathering of disaggregated data by gender, age and other social groups (such as persons with disabilities, elderly, minorities, poor, etc.). This is crucial in order to tailor targeted policies, such as gender-responsive policies, minority-oriented plans and strategies, and disability-friendly policies, among others.

Finally, governments and civil society organizations should work hand-in-hand and optimize their partnerships using a participatory approach to planning, implementing and monitoring the SDGs, including SDG10, in order to ensure that "no one is left behind". As Professor Jeffrey Sachs said, "despite the cynicism, confusion, and obstructionist politics surrounding efforts to fight poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, a breakthrough is possible".⁶² This breakthrough is possible through the mobilization of all stakeholders and the development of an integrated pool of policies that fit the different interdependent topics of the SDGs.

"One of the main lessons I have learned during my five years as Secretary-General is that broad partnerships are the key to solving broad challenges. When governments, the United Nations, businesses, philanthropies and civil society work hand-in-hand, we can achieve great things".

Ban Ki Moon

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