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**Subject:** Challenges & Priorities in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 Development Agenda in the Arab Countries

## **Background:**

This paper will reflect the main outcomes of the Regional workshop for the Arab Countries, organized by the United Nations Foundation, King Abdullah II for Development Fund, Strategic Studies Center in the University of Jordan and Columbia University: Middle East Research Center, held in Amman, Jordan 4-5<sup>th</sup> March, 2013 with the focus on the post-2015 priorities of the Arab World Development Agenda.

## **Introduction:**

The regional workshop, which brought together several experts from several Arab countries, did focus on five themes relevant to the main areas of the MDGs, mainly economics and skills, women's empowerment, sustainable growth and employment, inequalities and governance and freedom.

Discussion of the above themes was conducted in separate working groups and then collectively, where the challenges and priorities of the post-2015 development agenda were identified.

However, in this paper the focus will be on the last theme, namely "governance and freedom", as it was considered by all experts in the workshop to be a cross-cutting theme which is poorly handled in the Arab World.

## **Governance and Freedom:**

The deliberations during the regional workshop regarding the governance issues came up with the understanding that “governance” covers a wide area that is not easily defined and touches upon many issues that are central to meeting the post-2015 challenges, and that good governance is needed in order to fulfill the aspiration of Arab nations. Additionally, experts decision came up with a simple definition of good governance that can be considered: a representative decision-making mechanism that accommodates the concerns, needs and aspirations of all citizens equally.

### **Governance and Freedom Challenges for post-2015:**

The main challenges in this regard can be summed as:

- A general lack of transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in the Arab world. There is a great imbalance of power between the government and citizens, in favor of government, which hinders the citizens’ ability to hold their governments accountable;
- The inefficient management of resources, with too great a focus on oil, while one of the great untapped resources, namely human capital, is not being used wisely;
- How do we measure good governance properly? The current metrics are based on the private sector’s perception of governance, which is not always relevant;
- Furthermore, the very idea of governance in the Arab world is relatively new, since governance is intimately tied to government and there is no real grass-roots awareness of this concept;
- A significant part of the problem is the lack of proper implementation of policies and laws. In many cases; and
- The role that media plays in governance has never been fully explored, nor has it featured in the discourse surrounding the subject.

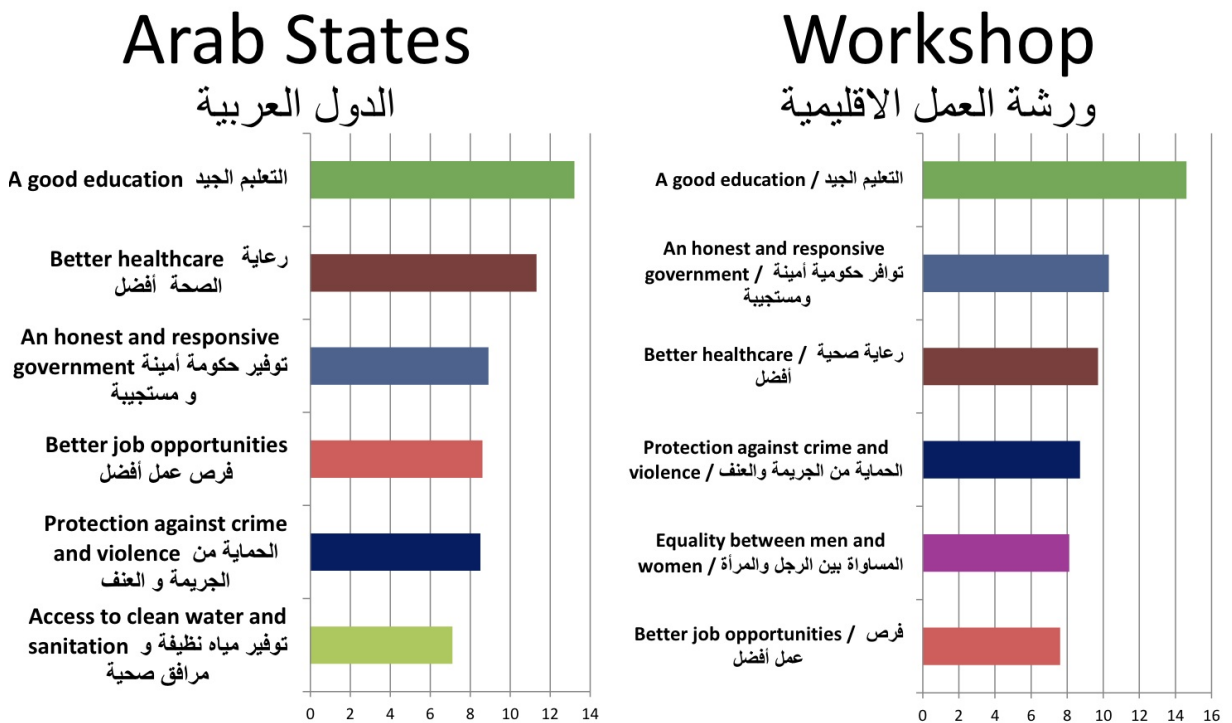
### **Arab World Development Agenda’s Priorities for Post-2015:**

This section consists of two-folds:

1. Regional experts in the workshop had responded to the United Nation’s Global Survey for a Better World titled “My world” and identified their top 6 priorities. A comparison with a previously conducted survey in the Arab countries showed a slight difference between both as follows:

## Top 6 Priorities

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2. Arab World priorities relevant to the challenges for post-2015 Development Agenda:

The challenges were identified upon provoking the below questions by the experts:

## 2/1 Do we ask the right questions?

- Continuous education gap:
  - culture and education systems reform;
  - educational governance;
  - early education; and
  - Inequality in education.
- Economic partnership gap:
  - Rentier state
  - Duality of the public and private sectors;
  - National and expatriate worker;
  - Organized and non-organized economy.
- Governance:
  - Views of whom?
- Women rights and practices – the gap:
  - Rights not privileges
  - Economic and political empowerment and lack thereof
- Equality in opportunities gap:
  - Inequality in education;
  - Inequality in service delivery;
  - Inequality in health;
  - Poor information

## 2/2 Were the right MDGs' priorities highlighted upon the year 2000?

Do our priorities differ from the global priorities?

- Arab development model failures;

- We did not develop the institutional governance to know the answer.

2/3 Do we have the correct indicators?

- Access to information;
- Quality instead of quantity (education);
- Connectivity of the indicators: geographical, gender, education, health;
- Governance gap: measurement of transparency, participation, partnership, accountability, rule of law, diversity, freedoms and separation of powers.

2/4 What is the distribution of roles and responsibilities?

- Our impact in the global dialogue and awareness;
- Development of Arab ..... regarding the needed model;
- Role of the state;
- Role of private sector; and
- Role of civic society

2/5 Is the Arab social contract constant or transformable?

- From duality of authoritative or imposition to democratic transformation;
- From economic rentier to economic production
- From clientele to justice in opportunities' distribution
- How to measure the transformation?

**Issues of post-2015, what do we measure?**

Issues of post-2015	What do we measure now?	What do we measure tomorrow?
Health	Sickness ratio, hunger	Success of health

	and child nutrition	insurance, national food safety.
Energy	N/A	Renewable energy.
Education	Illiteracy, compulsory education for both male and female.	Vocational training, quality of education and matching supply to demand.
Human security & safety	Ghettos, marginalized areas.	Conflicts & forced migration.
Water	Drinking water connection.	Risk of desertification and efficiency in water consumption.
Growth & employment	Unemployment and economic participation	Productivity, informal sectors & women participation.
Environment & sustainability	Contamination & depletion of resources.	Change of climate.
Population growth	Fertility rates	Migration towards cities
Inequality	Extreme poverty	Relative poverty and income distribution, women rights and minorities.
Governance	N/A	Freedom, equality, participation ,transparency and accountability.

**Governance and Freedom theme recommendations:**

- First, there needs to be a real grass-roots understanding of the concept of governance;
- Although the short term goals of reducing corruption and increasing the transparency and accountability of institutions are worthy, they

should be tied in to the more important, long term goal of creating a culture where good governance is expected and demanded, not merely talked about;

- This naturally includes the reform of the education systems to produce valuable members of society and productive citizens; a culture of dialogue and respect for the opinions of others, and the linking of women's empowerment and human rights to governance;
- The reform of institutions is an important step in ensuring good governance. In many countries that experienced unrest, the shift towards a more democratic and accountable system is not possible without a fundamental reform of the institutions;
- Among these reforms are two key points that need to be tackled:
  - The distribution of resources should be de-politicized and separated from the power of the ruling elite; and,
  - The culture of restricting information needs to be reversed to one where information is open and freely available, which will lead to more accountability;
- The metrics that are used should include a wider range of indicators to measure performance, such as human rights and women's empowerment ; and,
- The role of the media should not be ignored, and should be factored into the discussions of governance, as the media can play a very constructive role in moving towards good governance.