UNITED NATIONS

E

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Twenty-eighth session
Tunis, 15-18 September 2014

Item 12 (d) of the provisional agenda

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE POLICIES OF ARAB STATES

MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT

I. BACKGROUND

1.   Measuring social justice is a process that faces the twin challenges of imperfect indicators and unreliable and inconsistent data. No measures can fully capture individuals' complex experiences of social justice; however, the indicators suggested in the present paper highlight the sectors that are most vital to social justice and provide a means of concretely evaluating change and progress in the Arab region. Moreover, the absence of data on the issue poses serious challenges. Where data is available, inconsistencies in measurement hinder cross-country or cross-regional comparisons.

2.   In official statistics, economic development and social and environmental issues are analysed through traditional sets of indicators, on the basis of established methods that are well integrated in decision-making processes. However, there are many questions that traditional statistics do not address. Growth in gross domestic product, for instance, does not necessarily accurately reflect the well-being of a population. Official statistics, therefore, should reach beyond traditional measures and seek data approaches related to governance, participation, social justice and well-being.

II. KEY ISSUES

3.   Poverty is considered as the principal barrier to social justice, because it not only denies people the right to adequate food and housing, but also "makes it near impossible to participate in society and develop the capacity to lead a self-determined life". The average poverty rate across the Arab region is 20 per cent; such an economic challenge presents a significant barrier to social justice. Moreover, poverty is positively correlated with lack of access to education and labour markets. Social justice can therefore be measured through school enrolment rates and employment rates. Comparing urban to rural areas and men to women in labour markets and higher education, and income differences by education level highlights several complexities and compounded vulnerabilities in those measures.

A. ACCESS TO BASIC GOODS AND SERVICES

4.   Indicators related to affordability and equal access to basic goods and services are perceived as a foundational measure of social justice. A minimum set of indicators covers the areas of highest importance, such as food security, housing, improved water and sanitation and personal security. Food security is part of a current research agenda included in the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The regional implementation of the Strategy in the Arab region is lead by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The minimum set comprises one indicator: percentage of undernourished children.

5.   The Global Strategy will facilitate the expansion of statistics related to food security. Housing (a basic social need) is measured through the following indicators related to affordability and quality:

(a) Percentage of private expenditure on housing (imputed rent);
(b) Quality of flooring material;
(c) Overcrowding percentage;
(d) Access to electricity (network).

6.   As a result of positive experiences from the Millennium Development Goals process and with respect to the needs of policymaking, measures of access to improved water and sanitation include the following:

(a) Access to piped water;
(b) Access to improved sanitation.

7.   Personal security is measured using official statistics that are of great interest to policymakers. For instance, many countries seek detailed and georeferenced data on road safety. Other measures relate to crime

and murder, which are the result of social justice problems, but can serve as warning indicators. The set of personal security indicators includes the following:

(a) Murder rate;
(b) Reported violent crimes;
(c) Traffic injuries (deaths);
(d) Deaths from political violence.

B. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

8. Issues of democratic governance are currently being tackled by politicians and human right advocates across the Arab region. When measuring social justice, there is a need to include equal opportunity indicators as pillars of democracy and justice. Currently, a substantial portion of such data is available from academia and civil society rather than official statistics; nevertheless, recent initiatives and the Millennium Development Goals process resulted in the official monitoring of some indicators.

9. Personal rights are probably most readily measurable through the proportion of citizens actually exercising their rights. However, this should be further expanded to cover the awarding of rights to citizens, thus further research is needed to build a theoretical basis. The following are the recommended personal rights indicators:

(a) Political rights;
(b) Electoral democracy (or percentage of citizens voting in national elections).

10. Official statistics also place strict limitations on measuring freedom. Of the following set of indicators, it is likely that only child marriage and contraceptive prevalence are available from official sources. Freedom indicators cover the following:

(a) Freedom of speech;
(b) Freedom of assembly;
(c) Child marriage;
(d) Corruption control;
(e) Freedom of movement;
(f) Freedom of the press.

11. Official statistics provide more data on social inclusion, as several indicators are traditionally covered by household surveys, labour force surveys and other systematic means of data collection. Social inclusion indicators cover the following:

(a) Unemployment insurance;
(b) Percentage of women in managerial occupations;
(c) Tolerance for immigrants and refugees;
(d) Poverty rate;
(e) Social protection floor;
(f) Access to social services by non-citizens;
(g) Income/expenditure inequality (Gini index).

C. IMPROVED WELL-BEING

12. There is no single definition of well-being and there remains considerable debate regarding its determinants. Further research is needed given that the concept remains the subject of conjecture rather than science. Overlap and confusion between the concepts of well-being and welfare must also be eliminated.

13. Given the limitations of official statistics in measuring well-being, the focus is on areas that are currently measurable with a solid theoretical and data basis. The existing frameworks take into consideration health, education, access to knowledge and information and environmental sustainability.

14. With regard to health, measurement focuses mostly on lifestyle and social situations, as areas of concern to health policy experts; however, a measure of public health expenditure should also be included. Health indicators cover the following:

    (a) Life expectancy;
    (b) Infant mortality rate;
    (c) Maternal mortality rate;
    (d) Percentage of obese adults;
    (e) Deaths from non-communicable diseases;
    (f) Ratio of health expenditure to military expenditure.

15. Education plays an important role in building human capital and is an area where equal opportunities are highly important. The following is a minimum set of education indicators:

    (a) Adult literacy;
    (b) Primary school enrolment;
    (c) Women's average years of schooling;
    (d) Gender parity in secondary education.

16. The concept of education may be broadened to include access to knowledge and information. Traditional measures are too heavily oriented towards information and communication technology supply, which is an unfortunate legacy of the Millennium Development Goals process. In the future, access to information should focus on household surveys and censuses; in other words, on the concept of usage. Such data, as opposed to supplier-side information, can be analysed from the viewpoint of different social groups. Noting the reservations raised above, the following are the current indicators of access to knowledge and information:

    (a) Internet users;
    (b) Mobile telephone subscribers.

17. Environmental sustainability is a key component of well-being and the following are its suggested indicators:

    (a) Greenhouse gas emissions;
    (b) Water wastage (leakage).

18. Depending on the circumstances and needs of municipalities, provinces and countries, these environmental indicators can be further expanded with indicators related to other types of pollution and waste management, and to energy efficiency methods. At the international level, indicators related to transboundary air pollution and shared water resources are of interest in certain regions.

III. OBJECTIVES

19. Panel 4 aims to provide a platform for dialogue and exchanging lessons learned among Arab leaders and prominent regional and international thinkers on the importance of obtaining relevant, reliable and impartial statistics on access to basic goods and services, equal opportunities and improved well-being.

20.   More specifically the panel discussion aims to undertake the following:

(a)   Translate social justice policy needs into a set of statistical indicators that provide an evidence base for such policies;

(b)   Reflect on how those indicators relate to existing frameworks, in particular those relating to measuring sustainable development and monitoring development goals;

(c)   Identify the gaps that currently exist in official statistics with respect to proposed indicators on social justice; for example, indicators on human rights, good governance and well-being.

IV. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

21.   The following are the suggested discussion questions:

(a)   What frameworks are needed for measuring social justice in the Arab region? What are the policy needs? What are the existing frameworks and their relevance to the Arab region?

(b)   What are the existing gaps in official statistics with respect to measuring social justice? What are the traditional measurements and recent developments?

(c)   How to rely on the use of data from unofficial sources (opinion polls, civil society, research, Big Data) in official statistics?

V. PARTICIPANTS

22.   The panel session will comprise high-level representatives from member States, senior policymakers, prominent academic thinkers and representatives from the private sector, the United Nations system and civil society.

VI. LANGUAGES

23.   Discussion will be conducted in Arabic and English, with simultaneous interpretation.

VII. CONTACTS

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