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**ARAB WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE
POST-2015 DEVELOPMENTAGENDA**

Summary

Less than two years remain until the 2015 deadline of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Governments in the Arab region must assess their progress towards the Goals, and reflect on the successes and challenges or gaps of the MDG process. This report sheds the light on lessons learned from the MDG experience, and the implications of those lessons for the empowerment of women and gender equality in the Arab region and for the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. The paper concludes with policy options towards the formulation of more inclusive and responsive development agendas in the Arab region rooted in principles of accountability, equality and human rights.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

1.   In September 2000, heads of State and Government across the world, including the Arab States and Governments, adopted the Millennium Declaration which specified six fundamental values as essential to international relations. In the desire to translate those values into actions, world leaders agreed on eight goals (initially consisting of 18 targets and 48 indicators) to be achieved by 2015. Since their inception, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have served as measuring tools in international and regional initiatives, such as the Arab Declaration on the Pursuit of the Implementation of MDGs (2005). They have also had a significant influence on policy discourse at national and regional levels.

2.   The Millennium Declaration emphasised the assurance of equal rights to development and equal opportunities for women and men without distinction on the basis of race, sex, language, religion and belief. As a result, it included a stand-alone goal focused on women and gender issues, namely Goal 3 to "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women". The inclusion of this goal signalled the worldwide realization of the significance of gender equality for achieving overall development outcomes. In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, "achieving the MDGs depends so much on women's empowerment and equal access by women to education, work, health care and decision-making".[1] Nevertheless, "gender inequality persists and women continue to face discrimination in access to education, decent work opportunities and economic assets, and also face very limited participation in government and decision-making".[2] In this regard, the situation in the Arab region is no different from the rest of the world. Despite progress at various socioeconomic fronts, especially in health and education, gender equality in the region has been an elusive goal. This has been most apparent in the near-absence of women from public policymaking in most countries. The Arab Human Development Report pointed out that most Arab countries continue to suffer from low status of women, demonstrated in violence against women, unequal civil and political rights, and discriminatory legislation.[3]

3.   With less than two years remaining to meet the 2015 deadline, Governments of the region must accelerate progress towards meeting the Goals, and in the process, assess successes and challenges. This would inform Governments on national and regional priorities related to both men and women and particularly to gender concerns. A deeper understanding in the region of the status of the Goals and their correspondence to women is an essential element for all stakeholders to engage effectively in the ongoing international debate on MDGs, and ultimately to shape the post-2015 development agenda.

4.   The objective of this paper is to bring women's issues and gender related concerns in the Arab region to the centre of the debate on post-2015 development agenda. It sheds the light on lessons learned from experience with MDGs, and their future implications for the empowerment of women and gender equality in the Arab region. The analysis argues that in the remaining course of the MDGs and beyond, member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) must align their national priorities for development with their human rights obligations, to ensure equality and non-discrimination for all. The paper draws on a desk review of the most up-to-date literature on MDGs and the post-2015 development agenda, and is divided in two parts. Part one focuses on the global post-2015 process, reflecting on the international debate on lessons learned from MDGs, especially Goal 3, and the directions of the new development framework. Part two brings the focus of the analysis to the Arab region, with a discussion of progress achieved on gender-related issues in the context of MDGs and the implications beyond 2015. The paper concludes with policy options towards the formulation of more inclusive and responsive development agendas in the Arab region rooted in principles of accountability, equality and human rights.

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[1] United Nations, 2012, *Millennium Development Goals Report*, p. 3.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

[3] United Nations Development Programme, 2009, *Arab Human Development Report*, p. 7.

I. MDGS, THE POST-2015 FRAMEWORK, AND GENDER EQUALITY:
THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

A. STATUS OF THE POST-2015 PROCESS

5.   As the 2015 deadline approaches, the international community has been engaged in flurry of activities to establish the framework that will supersede the MDG agenda. As a starting point, the outcome document of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on MDGs requested the Secretary-General to recommend further steps to advance the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. Currently, the process is being informed by the outcome of various consultations, notably the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

6.   The Secretary-General established the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda to coordinate system-wide preparations in consultation with all stakeholders. The Task Team brought together senior experts from United Nations system entities and other international organizations and produced 18 "thematic think pieces" on central issues of the post-2015 development agenda. It submitted a report entitled Realizing the Future We Want for All to the Secretary-General in June 2012, which outlined a vision for the post-2015 development agenda and suggested structuring it according to the four dimensions: inclusive economic development; inclusive social development; environmental sustainability; and peace and security.

7.   The Task Team published a second report entitled A Renewed Global Partnership for Development in March 2013. The report provided recommendations and proposed a format for a global partnership beyond 2015. It recommended that the partnership should include universal commitments calling for actions from all countries, according to their national capabilities. Moreover, it argued that the development framework must build on existing commitments such as those reflected in MDGs, the Monterey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, but must also be broadened and strengthened in response to the large array of current global challenges.

8.   Furthermore, the Secretary-General established the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, and requested the Panel to "prepare a bold yet practical vision" on the post-2015 development agenda to eradicate poverty and support sustainable development. In May 2013, the Panel submitted a report entitled A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economics Through Sustainable Development, which indicated broad agreement on the need to arrive at one global development agenda with sustainable development at its centre, in line with the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Affirming the connection between sustainable development and MDGs, the report stated that "a focus on the poorest and most marginalised, a disproportionate number of whom are women, follows directly from the principles agreed to in the Millennium Declaration and at Rio. These principles should remain the foundation of the post-2015 agenda".[4] Heads of State and Government reaffirmed that position in the Outcome document of the special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.[5]

9.   Beyond this, the United Nations Development Group has undertaken the most comprehensive global consultation in the history of the organization, convening 11 global thematic consultations, in addition to over 80 country-level consultations, and a global e-consultation on what should supersede MDGs. A recently launched global survey for individuals around the world, called My World, supported by the United Nations and other partners, is seeking to capture the voices and views of all on priorities post-2015.[6] Outside the United Nations system, a vast range of stakeholders are engaging in and seeking to influence the agenda.

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[4] High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, 2013, *A New Global Partnership*, p. 7.

[5] General Assembly, A/68/L.4[*].

[6] See annex and chapter II section B. Two consultations have been held in the Arab region.

For example, civil society actors are mobilizing the Beyond 2015 campaign and there are also regional and issue-based platforms.[7]

10.   Compared to the process that was undertaken to establish the original MDGs, the United Nations has devoted considerable time and resources to active consultation on the post-2015 process. These consultations respond to a growing call for the active participation of all member countries in shaping "the future we want". Many stakeholders are engaging in substantial analysis, debate and lobbying to influence the post-2015 development framework. It is hoped that this participatory approach will ensure individual ownership of the development agenda and will lead to an increased commitment to achieve its goals. It is expected that it will also enhance accountability and lines of responsibility.

B. MDGs: Successes, shortcomings and lessons learned

11.   In recent years, MDGs have been subjected to intensive critical review that has highlighted their successes and failures. On the one hand, it is well acknowledged that the significance of MDGs lies in their attempt to combine an inspirational common vision with a set of concrete and time-bound goals and measurable targets. To that effect, there are indications that the MDG agenda has indeed succeeded in strengthening some of the basic dimensions of human development and in strengthening international cooperation for development. Furthermore, the MDG framework has helped to galvanize development efforts and guide global and national priorities. On the other hand, it has been repeatedly argued that commitments to MDGs at all levels were hampered by the top-down approach to priorities, challenges and strategies.

12.   There has been significant criticism of the basic structures and foundations, implementation process, and defined targets of MDGs. The Goals have been faulted for their failure to operationalize the values underscored in the Millennium Declaration as prerequisites for enhancing human development, such as peace and security, human rights and governance.[8] MDGs also fell short of addressing issues of productive employment, violence against women, social protection, inequalities, and social exclusion, to name a few.

13.   Criticism has also been directed at the focus of MDGs on results rather than on the means to achieve them.[9] Targets and indicators were narrowly defined and gender blind, and it was left up to each country to decide upon the desired development approach or policy framework to achieve the Goals. Most countries operated outside the context of a well defined accountability framework, which led to uneven progress between Goals, within each country, and across countries and regions.

14.   Indeed, given the nature of MDGs as declaratory political commitments, the failure to link them up with international human rights and other related instruments has created the challenge of holding States accountable for their commitments. Had the Goals been aligned with international treaty standards and principles, these commitments would have become a matter of legal obligation rather than discretion. The human rights approach is most essential for a development process that is rooted in equality and efficiency.[10] Human rights, in all their encompassing social, economic, political and civil dimensions, are embedded in the United Nations Charter and various conventions and treaties. States parties to such treaties are obliged to provide universal access to basic social rights, eschew discrimination, achieve substantive equality and ensure the availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, adaptability and quality of services.

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[7]   *Declaration of Civil Society Organizations from the Arab Region on the Post-2015 Framework*, 2013, p. 5.

[8]   Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2012, *Governance and Development*, p. 6.

[9]   Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2012, *Review of the Contributions of the MDG Agenda to Foster Development*, p. 16.

[10]   See http://hrbaportal.org/.

15.   Goal 3, which aims to "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women", has succeeded in bringing a gender perspective into the broader development agenda and in increasing political will towards the needs and priorities of women and girls. The main success of Goal 3 has been putting forward the target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels of education no later than 2015. It specifically lists the following indicators:

(a)   Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education;
(b)   Ratio of literate females to males, 15-24 years old;
(c)   Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector;
(d)   Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

16.   However, despite progress achieved thus far on the implementation of Goal 3, there has been no advancement in terms of structural transformation in gender relations. This is mostly related to the limitations of the targets and the indicators listed above, generally advanced outside overall national socioeconomic and political contexts. The Task Team affirmed that "gender equality has long been recognized both as a human right and a core development goal. In addition, discrimination against women and girls impairs progress in all other areas of development".[11] The poverty of women is commonly believed to be caused at least in part by gender inequality. The unequal distribution of income, access to work opportunities and decision-making power, along with gender based violence and discriminatory laws, all contribute to the poverty of women. Gender inequality is regarded as the single most persistent form of inequality and discrimination in all societies. This led to the conclusion that "a new post-2015 Development Agenda should therefore include not only a universal goal for gender equality and the empowerment and advancement of women and girls, but also ensure that gender and other dominant inequalities are mainstreamed in all relevant areas through disaggregated targets and indicators".[12]

17.   As summarized in the 2013 MDG Report, "whether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives".[13] As noted above, gender and women's issues are narrowly defined in the Goals, and Goal 3 includes only one target on education along with narrow indicators on political representation and employment. Other indicators related to the environment, governance, poverty and hunger lacked a gender component. Furthermore, gaps in the MDG framework, such as the absence of targets on violence against women and property ownership contributed to its failure to achieve structural change. In its 2013 report, the High-level Panel described the multidimensional challenges that must be overcome to achieve gender equality:

"These barriers can only be removed when there is zero tolerance of violence against and exploitation of women and girls, and when they have full and equal rights in political, economic and public spheres. Women and girls must have equal access to financial services, infrastructure, the full range of health services including [sexual and reproductive health and rights], water and sanitation, the equal right to own land and other assets, a safe environment in which to learn and apply their knowledge and skills, and an end to discrimination so they can receive equal pay for equal work, and have an equal voice in decision-making."[14]

18.   The report entitled *A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015*, the Secretary-General emphasized that "gender-based violence contravenes women's and girls' rights, undermines development and is an affront to our common humanity".[15]

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[11]   Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2012, *Report to the Secretary-General*, p. 23.

[12]   See http://www.unicef.org/media/media_67926.html.

[13]   United Nations, 2013, *Millennium Development Goals Report*, p. 5.

[14]   High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, 2013, *A New Global Partnership*, p. 17.

[15]   United Nations, A/68/202, para. 26.

19.   Since the emergence of MDGs in 2000, the world has made significant strides in tackling different dimensions of poverty. However, progress has been uneven and unequal between and within countries, between different social groups, and especially between men and women. It has been argued that the current set of MDGs, which measures progress at the country and global level, has masked rather than eliminated inequalities. Various systems and dynamics of inequality have continued despite national-level progress towards MDGs.

C. PROPOSED PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

20.   Emerging consensus from the High-level Panel and the various national, thematic and regional consultations highlights the need to promote a universal, common and coherent post-2015 global development agenda that integrates economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. It was also recognized that universal values of inclusive participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and the rule of law should be at the core of the post-2015 development agenda. It was agreed that, unlike MDGs, the future development agenda should reflect the full range of international standards for civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.[16] From a human development point of view, the post-2015 framework should be based on three main principles: human rights; equality; and governance.

1. *Human rights*

21.   There is broad agreement that "development is considered to be the right of every individual and it is the duty of the state to guarantee it. A human rights approach provides basic principles on which action should be based. They include non-discrimination, human dignity, participation and accountability".[17] Adopting the human rights approach to development in the post-2015 framework would allow the possibility of avoiding the inherent shortcomings of the MDG framework. According to the Advisory Council on International Affairs, "changing a goal into a right can encourage people to demand accountability from the state. The MDGs would then no longer be mere targets, but legal obligations to be fulfilled by the state. Specifying human rights in relation to the MDGs could result in improved monitoring mechanisms".[18] Additionally, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) emphasized in their assessment of the post-2015 proposed framework that human rights "are essential in creating a culture where those who exercise authority are answerable to those in their society facing poverty, deprivation and discrimination".[19]

2. *Equality*

22.   One of the main lessons learned from the MDG experience is the need to put equality at the core of the future development agenda. Various consultations and reports stress the fact that the new framework must tackle the interrelated concepts of equity, equality and non-discrimination. The report entitled Realizing the Future We Want for All pointed out that "the empowerment of women and girls and the protection of their rights should be centre-pieces of the post-2015 agenda". It further indicates that mechanisms for the protection of those rights would include legal provisions and their effective implementation, in addition to policies to do the following: encourage social transformation and acceptance of gender equality; reduce gender inequality in the labour force; protect reproductive rights; and improve access to good quality health and education services and social protection.[20]

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[16] Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2012, *Towards Freedom from Fear and Want*, p. 4.

[17] Rolph van der Hoeven, 2012, *MDGs Post-2015: Beacons in Turbulent Times or False Lights?*, p. 24.

[18] Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2011, *Report No. 74*, p. 62.

[19] OHCHR and CESR, 2013, *Who Will Be Accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, p. 30.

[20] Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2012, *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, p. 25.

23.   The report of the High-level Panel specifically emphasized that the post-2015 development agenda should address the causes of poverty, exclusion and inequality. Noting that the majority of those living in extreme poverty are women and girls, the report pointed out that gender equality should be tackled as a core development goal seeking not only to eliminate specific gender gaps, but also to transform the structural factors that underpin the widespread persistence of gender inequality, gender-based violence, discrimination and unequal development progress between women and men, girls and boys.[21]

24.   These issues are to be accepted and acted upon by national Governments and the international community as part of their commitments and obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Copenhagen Summit, and more recently, the outcome of Rio+20.

3. *Governance*

25.   There is broad agreement that the new development framework must support governance for peaceful, inclusive and responsive human development. The experiences of many countries have highlighted the inherent links between good governance and development and have suggested that the law, governance, and institutions play a significant role in achieving development goals.[22] Establishing legal frameworks, enforcing rules and procedures and reducing corruption will enable the effective delivery of health, education and other social services. Without these elements, countries are likely to fail to meet their development targets. Legitimate laws and credible enforcement mechanisms contribute to expanding opportunities for participation in economic and political life.

26.   Reform processes may draw on international commitments and obligations to promote and protect the human rights of all in accordance with principles of equality and non-discrimination. An effective and efficient judiciary system rooted in these universal principles would strengthen gender equality and the rights of women. This was affirmed during the Rio+20 conference, where States acknowledged that democracy, good governance and the rule of law, at the national and international levels, with the necessary structural elements of an enabling environment, are essential for sustainable development. More specifically, the Rio+20 outcome document stressed the importance of reducing inequality and ensuring inclusion and justice as a basis of international law, with reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Additionally, the report recognized the importance of good governance as a cornerstone for development, and suggested goals and targets on governance. Thus, the post-2015 development agenda must be informed by and supportive of effective governance at all levels, rule of law and the empowerment of people. The new agenda must encourage the participation of those who are marginalized and enable them to participate in decision-making at all levels.

27.   In this context, it is evident that gender equality is central to human rights, equality and governance, the three principles at the core of the proposed post-2015 framework. To this end, numerous proposals for gender equality have been put forward by United Nations agencies and civil society organizations for the post-2015 development agenda. Proposals include a stand-alone approach (gender equality as a separate goal), a cross-cutting approach (mainstreaming gender in individual goals, targets and indicators), and a twin-track approach that combines the previous two options. The common objective of these approaches is to single out the priorities of women and girls and encourage a transformative shift to eliminate impediments to gender equality and women's enjoyment of equal rights.

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[21]   High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, 2013, *A New Global Partnership*, pp. 7 and 9.

[22]   ESCWA, 2011, *Trends and Impacts in Conflict Settings: Conflict and MDGs*, No. 2.

28.   Currently, the twin-track approach to gender equality in the future development agenda seems to be the favoured option. There is a broad consensus that such an approach will catalyse progress towards eliminating the structural foundations of gender inequality, and achieving the full realization of the rights of women. This approach incorporates the centrality of gender equality to development and the eradication of poverty. It is expected to foster political will, resources and national ownership to create sustainable and effective action on gender equality.

II. MDGS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA IN THE ARAB REGION: PRIORITIES AND POLICY OPTIONS

A. STATUS OF MDGS IN THE ARAB REGION

29.   Over the years, MDGs gained widespread acceptance across the Arab region. Governments have gradually adopted the Goals and worked on reflecting them in their national development plans. On many occasions, they reiterated their commitments to achieve MDG targets by 2015 with concrete steps to integrate them in their adopted policies and programmes. As a result, the region has witnessed improvements at various socioeconomic levels. Significant progress has been made towards health and education goals within most countries. This was manifested in an overall improvement in school enrolment rates, literacy of youth aged 15-24, and infant mortality rates.[23]

30.   In terms of Goal 3 on gender equality, Governments in the region adopted measures to meet the indicated targets, which indeed resulted in improvements including the increase in female life expectancy and the decrease in the maternal mortality ratio. Similarly, progress has been achieved in female literacy rates and in the access of women and girls to all education levels. As a result, most countries in the region have reduced gender disparity in access to education, at least at the primary level.

31.   However, the region continues to suffer from persistent poverty and inequality. Uneven development and disparities (at every level and on every basis, including gender) are evident in most countries, and some countries are unlikely to achieve certain Goals by the 2015 deadline. In the political, economic and legal spheres divisions persist between men and women, urban and rural residents, and various social groups in terms of rights, benefits, participation and access to resources.[24] These inequalities are directly ascribed to the failure in most countries to adopt a holistic approach to the implementation of MDGs in a manner that introduces and enforces structural and institutional changes.

32.   Challenges in achieving MDGs in the Arab region have been linked to "slow progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and the low priority given to gender mainstreaming in national development plans".[25] Indeed, gender inequality in Arab countries is often deeply rooted in discrimination and injustice in unequal access to legal systems or social and economic resources. Progress reports on MDGs show that Arab women are disadvantaged in terms of their political and economic participation and rights. The role of women in decision-making, despite some recent progress, remains very limited. Available figures indicate that women in the Arab region held 13.3 per cent of seats in parliaments in 2012, a lower rate than any other region of the world.[26] Likewise, the economic participation of women in the Arab region continues to be considered the lowest in the world.[27] Improvements in educational performance across the region have not translated into greater employment opportunities or equal political representation.

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[23] ESCWA, 2013, *A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda*, p. 31.

[24] ESCWA, 2013, *Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking Beyond 2015*, p. 68.

[25] ESCWA, 2011, *Progress in the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the ESCWA Region: A Gender Lens*, p. 13.

[26] Data courtesy of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, available from www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP2012e.pdf.

[27] International Labour Organization, 2012, *Global Employment Trends 2012: Preventing a Deeper Jobs Crisis.*

Additionally, violence against women and girls remains one of the biggest challenges in the region, deterring women and girls from fully participating in all aspects of society.

33. Progress towards gender equality in the Arab region is hindered by the prevalence of discriminatory national legislation in personal status laws, criminal codes, labour regulations and policies. Gender inequality is seen as a structural obstacle, which undermines overall progress and prevents the achievement of development goals for all in the region. It has been well established that most of efforts to achieve MDGs addressed the symptoms instead of the root causes of gender inequality. The process did not integrate Goal 3 into the broader development approach or the legal obligations under international treaties and frameworks.

34. Challenges in implementing a successful MDG agenda in the region are also rooted in the top-down approach of its initiation and formulation. National stakeholders did not participate effectively in the MDG process, which meant that especially within civil society, there was no sense of ownership of the Goals and their targets, which negatively impacted the realization of the Goals, particularly Goal 3. Furthermore, national machinery for the advancement of women in the region, acknowledged as an essential stakeholder in the overall development path and in ensuring gender equality and the advancement of women in all national policies and programmes, have had limited and inconsistent involvement in the process of implementing MDGs and in monitoring and evaluating progress. Their role has been limited to participating in steering committees established by planning ministries and providing data when available.

35. The Beijing Platform for Action recommended the establishment of national machineries to "design, promote the implementation of, execute, monitor, evaluate, advocate and mobilize support for policies that promote the advancement of women". Most Arab countries have now established national mechanisms for women, organized either as specialized ministries or as committees or councils for women's affairs and related issues. Their role is vital to ensuring that the gender perspective is reflected in national development policies, strategies and programmes. The exclusion of national machineries for the advancement of women from the MDGs process in the region prevented the concerns of women from being included in national and international agendas, and resulted in turn in the weakening the process itself.

B. REGIONAL PRIORITIES POST-2015 AND PROPOSED POLICY OPTIONS

36. As 2015 approaches, the debate over the future development agenda is focussed on its goals and strategies. The world community has reiterated its commitment to the eradication of poverty. And as indicated in chapter I, there is a general consensus that the post-2015 development agenda should reflect the principles of human rights, equality and governance. The new framework should therefore preserve the inclusion and participation of all and its priorities must be determined collectively. Reflecting on the MDG experience across the world, gender equality has also been identified (anew) at the core of the development agenda. The favoured approach to gender issues in the post-2015 framework combines a stand-alone goal related to gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender into all other goals, targets and indicators.

37. In its participation in the consultative process beyond 2015, the Arab region has on the whole endorsed the general emerging consensus indicated above. Principles of equality, human rights and governance were indeed echoed during the Arab Development Forum: Priorities for the Post-2015 Development Agenda in the Arab Countries, which was held in April 2013. In addition to the values enshrined in the United Nations Charter and international human rights treaties, voices from the Arab region emphasized the importance of equity, resilience, sustainability, accountability and participation. A recent report of the United Nations regional commissions outlined the priorities of the Arab region for the post-2015 development agenda as follows:

(a) Ensure human rights, freedoms and social justice in order to promote inclusive and equitable development;

(b) Strengthen governance, effective institutions, democracy and the rule of law;

(c)   End the occupation of Palestine; address the root causes and foster the resolutions of conflict and war, as well as their regional spillover effects;

(d)   Address the different dimensions of poverty and exclusion; reduce the different dimensions of inequality – income, geographical and social (gender, age, ethnic, etc.) – and promote human development.[28]

38.   Moreover, the priorities of the region were put forward with an indication of a clear message on gender equality and women's empowerment. In line with prevailing thinking on this issue, stakeholders from the region advocated for a twin-track approach to gender equality in the new development framework. "The post-2015 agenda needs to move from the mere mainstreaming of gender equality, to gender equity as central to any new development paradigm and not a mere by-product of certain policies focused on numerical goals".[29] It has been proposed that the post-2015 development framework include targets addressing violence against women and girls and targets on the legal rights of women.

39.   To overcome the shortcomings of the MDG framework and build on lessons learned from that experience, national ownership of the formulation and implementation of the post-2015 agenda has been highlighted across the board, with calls for full involvement of civil society and various stakeholders. In this context, it is evident that national machineries for the advancement of women, as national custodians of the effort to achieve gender equality and empower women, are central to the post-2015 process and its prospects for success. At this point, it remains unclear if national machineries for women have been properly involved and if their input has been effectively reflected in the consultation process. Drawing on their unique role in bringing gender-related issues to the core of national development, it is essential that national machineries for the advancement of women are fully included at every step related to the post-2015 process and its ultimate outcomes. A system of accountability is needed to ensure checks and balances along with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities for all.

40.   The proposed policy options build on two principles: (1) the post-2015 process affords a timely opportunity for the region to look back at its development path, reconsider its approach and address gaps and shortcomings with the involvement of all; and (2) the rights of women and gender equality are at the core of effective and sustainable development, especially considering that the region is undergoing changes and that have gender issues at their very foundation. Member countries in the Arab region should consider the following policy options to maximize and ensure the benefits of an evolving post-2015 process for all, men and women alike.

(a)   Accelerate the implementation of MDGs (with MDG 3 as a cross-cutting goal) to meet the deadline of 2015 by identifying needed and realistic interventions to achieve the stated targets, areas of concern that impede the effectiveness of key interventions on the ground, and solutions to priority issues;

(b)   Align national and subnational goals and targets with the legal obligations of the State under international treaties and national strategies for development;

(c)   Institute a monitoring, reviewing and accountability framework on agreed commitments (as stated in MDGs and beyond) with robust, inclusive country-owned mechanisms that account clearly for the role of all stakeholders, including civil society and national machineries for women;

(d)   Activate the role of national machineries for women with a support structure that allows them to contribute to global debates about the post-2015 framework, and to the positions drawn up by their countries and other relevant actors, to ensure that the forthcoming development commitments are firmly grounded in the articulated priorities of Arab women;
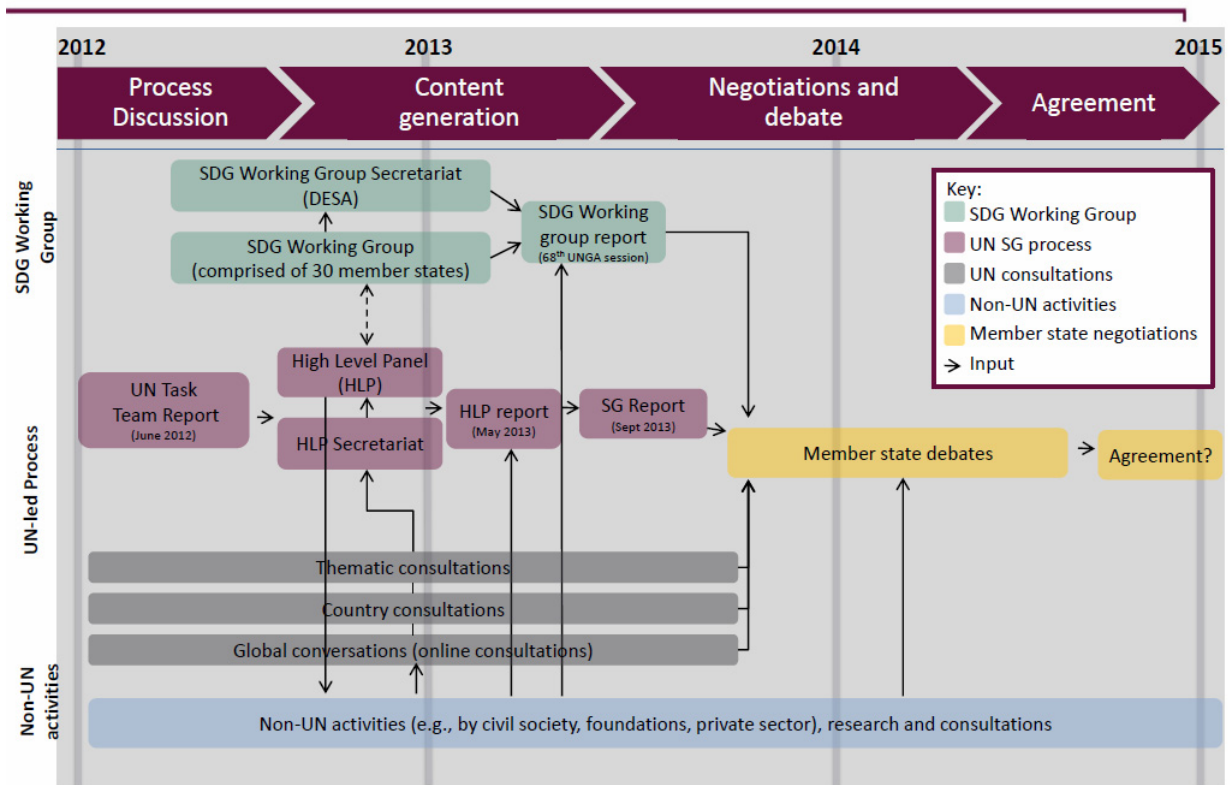
(e)   Engage national machineries for women in the evolving post-2015 process at the national and regional levels, especially in adapting goals, targets and indicators to reflect internationally-agreed principles along with regional and national specificities.

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[28]   United Nations, 2013, *A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda*, p. 69.

[29]   *Declaration of Civil Society Organizations from the Arab Region on the Post-2015 Framework*, 2013, p. 8.

Annex

PROCESS TIMELINE OF THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Source: UNF and Dalberg analysis