

**High-level UN regional seminar
mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council
on the “The Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of all Human Rights”**

Tuesday, 8 November to Wednesday, 9 November - Beirut.

Key notes – Lamia El Moubayed

09:30-10:30 Keynote panel: Reflections on Development Strategy and Policy and their contribution to all human rights

This session discusses how development policies and strategies can be used to direct economies towards contributing to the enjoyment of all human rights for all including through innovation and investment. What can be done to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights in the process? How can active, free and meaningful participation and other civil and political rights contribute for policies that are more effective in promoting the enjoyment of all human rights?

On the basis of your experience, how can development policies and strategies contribute to the enjoyment of human rights in this region? What can be done to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights in the development process?

First of all, I would like to congratulate the organizers on this particularly timely discussion.

In a region marked by significant challenges including recurrent and increasingly intense intervals of violence affecting civil and political rights, deeply rooted inequalities in terms of economic and social rights, limited access to basic services, and discrimination against specific groups, discussions on the linkages between development policies and enjoyment of human rights are particularly relevant.

As a woman from the region, vice chair of the UN-ECOSOC committee of experts on public administration, it is my pleasure and honor to contribute to expanding the reflections.

Let me start outright by saying that discussing development and human rights in the Arab region requires that we set the scene just and by that, I mean clearly seeing the interconnections between Peace-Development and Human Rights as a trilogy, each pillar reinforcing the other or undermining it.

A region rich in potential but mined by risks

1. The Arab region is a diverse region, with a potential for more and better growth but it is mined by risks

It is home to a youthful population and increasingly educated population, unique energy resources and some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. It benefits from a privileged geographic location with access to large markets.

- with comparative advantages in several sectors such as manufacturing, renewable energies and tourism.
- 50% of the world’s conventional oil reserves and 42% of conventional gas reserves;
- It forms the southern neighborhood of the European Union, which the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) calls a “**political and security front**”.
- **It is the largest provider of ODA outside of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC).** *In 2015, their combined ODA reached 0.86% of GNI, outstanding the UN 0.7% target. Over 90 per cent of Arab development assistance is provided by mainly three countries: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.*

2. But it remains the world’s least peaceful region.

It is exposed to various types of conflicts, wars and occupation with increasing frequency and impact, threatening social cohesion, economic prosperity, political stability and respect for human rights

The region is home to 5 of the 10 least peaceful countries in the world, with only Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates being ranked in the top 50 most peaceful countries. Moreover, brutal political forces continue to plague the region, including the only remaining physical occupation in the twenty-first century, that of Palestine.

No data is up-to-date enough to capture population movements, rising numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); persistent injustice; mounting frustration over unemployment and rising rates of poverty; unequal access to, and overexploitation of, scarce water and other natural resources (ASD report 2015).

Conflict in the Middle East has been the key driver of the global deterioration in peacefulness since 2008 according to the [Global Peace Index 2022](#). - *year-on-year deteriorations in peacefulness have been recorded for ten of the last 14 years.*-

3. The intensity and recurrence of conflicts and wars are making conflicts deeply entrenched and very hard to overcome even in the long term (IMF, 2016).

This renders progress in development highly complex and volatile. We now know that the effects on GDP, inflation fiscal and financial positions, economic and governance institutions... are many times stronger in MENA than for the average of all conflict types worldwide.

It is also likely for MENA conflicts to persist for some time: As long as their root causes are deeply entrenched in social and political polarization fueled by strong population growth, economic inequality, and ideological and religious schisms, sustainable peace prospects remain severely undermined.

Focusing on the geopolitical tensions has two reasons

➤ **Because conflicts heighten violations of human rights**

Gender based violence is an example, with significant impact at the individual level, and a wider societal impact, including lower productivity and thus reduced economic output and growth, and increased pressure on social and health services

➤ **And Because conflicts are shifting away resources from development**

In GDP terms, the economic cost of violence **for the 10 most affected countries ranges between 30 and 68 per cent of GDP.**

The WEF estimates the cost of environmental degradation is estimated at 5 % of countries' GDP

According to the International Peace Research Institute IPRI, military spending - the highest in the world (**11% points higher than the world average in 2016**) rose by **18.8 per cent in 2021** relative to the previous year to **reach \$7.7 trillion**... Seven of the ten countries with the largest per capita weapons imports are from the region. 2022 witnessed the largest increase in average value per capita of weapons imports in the world.

As such, much needed resources are continuously redirected away from socioeconomic development and weighs heavily on the capacity of States to achieve the SDGs (ESCWA, 2017).

Reallocating 10% of military spending across the region would help achieve substantive progress on key SDGs.

Moreover,

*Arab youth survey 2022: An overwhelming majority of young Arabs — 82 per cent across the Mena region — said **pushing for stability in their country was more important than promoting democracy**. The figure is in stark contrast to the 2009 Arab Youth Survey findings, in which 92 per cent of respondents in the same age group said their greatest priority was to live in a democratic country.*

For development policies and strategies to contribute meaningfully to the enjoyment of human rights in this region,

The TRILOGY: Peace | Development | Human rights must be addressed in parallel.

On the Human Rights and Development front

- The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated **inequality** of wealth and access to basic services such as **education** (*shifting to online education and deepening existing gaps in terms of access to technology, as 48% of families lack internet at home.*) and **health care** and **work**, especially among young people, women, and those with low skills. With the notable exception of some Gulf countries, the poor suffered the most.
- **Their right to freedom of expression** remained severely restricted with internet censorship and more investment in digital surveillance equipment.
- **Human rights defenders** faced criminal prosecutions, imprisonment, administrative restrictions, threats and intimidation and the violent repression of protests.

According to the recent report by ESCWA "Inequality in the Arab region is a ticking bomb" :

- **Poverty:** This is the only region where extreme poverty has increased since 2010 (from around 2% to more than 5%,) and has become the home to more than 30% of the world refugees. A quarter of the population is poor. And the proportion of the population living in poverty is projected to increase.
- **Poverty is intergenerational:** If a family falls into poverty, it is likely to remain poor for several generations.
- **Income Inequality:** The Arab region is the least equal in the world in terms of income. 58% of the national income in 2020 falls in the hands of the richest 10%, compared to only 8% in the hands of the poorest 50%. The Gini index for the last five years is estimated at about 35%, a percentage that is among the largest in the world, and inequality between regions, social classes and genders is increasing.
- **inequality prevails across generations.** Its effects are devastating to society: the chronically high unemployment rate in the region has dire effects: social exclusion, poverty, income inequality, marginalization, exploitation, frustration, political instability, social unrest, and violence
- **Unemployment** rate among young men and women remained the highest in the world over the past 25 years. with 1 in 2 young women unemployed and not enrolled in educational or training programs, compared to 1 in 5 young men.
- Despite Arab governments have upscaled or revamped existing social protection systems, spending on social protection is still relatively low. **4% of the GDP of high-income Arab** countries compared to 16.4% in the world's high-income countries.

As we are stepping up the recovery phase, ... **prospects of development remain uncertain in view of emerging challenges and macroeconomic volatility.**

Feelings of insecurity are on the rise nearly everywhere and happening while global Human Development indicators are on the decline, reversing in many countries – and Lebanon is one example -the development gains of the preceding five years.

The Arab region has unfortunately become "*one of the largest concentrations of misery and despair in the world*" (Diwan, 2020). محفل الضيق والخيبة بدل أن يكون بشارة اليأس والرجاء.

This contrasts the AYS 2022 where more than half of interviewees, 54 per cent, say they will have a better life than their parents — the highest level of optimism seen in the survey over the past three years.

Maybe this is another Gap.

What is also noted is the sentiment the youth have: at least 63 per cent of young interviewees said they have more rights and freedoms today as a result of the uprisings despite the perceived negative outlook on democratic movements in their respective countries. This sentiment is felt most strongly in the Gulf, where 68 per cent of those polled said they enjoyed more rights today than in 2010.

How can we address these mounting insecurities and discrimination as we are charting forward the development path of our countries?

No single policy can put us on a promising path, and a combination of integrated policies and financing plans are necessary. Five priority areas of work:

1- **Eradicate POVERTY:**

Rising poverty have significant implications on the region's potential for development, further weakening human rights, exacerbating inequalities and gender stereotypes, reinforcing ethnic, tribal or patronage networks v/s political transformation or the consolidation of welfare states, and increasing risks of conflicts.

This puts additional pressure on social policies and spending that would need to be innovative and forward-looking to address a complex poverty ecosystem, if they are to effectively improve livelihoods and provide current and future generations with meaningful opportunities to grow in their home countries.

In its [Study on the contribution of development to the enjoyment of human rights](#) (A/HRC/41/50), the Human Rights Council reaffirmed that **the existence of extreme poverty inhibited the full and effective enjoyment of human rights**, and that its immediate alleviation and eventual eradication must remain a high priority for the international community, and that the efforts towards the achievement of that goal should be strengthened.

2- **Reduce income inequality differently.** IMF research show that African countries made tremendous progress in reducing regional income inequality and that progress was largely due to improvements in basic infrastructure. Well-designed redistributive fiscal policy with a clear investment strategy to assist underserved regions is one important lever. Macroeconomic stability is a must to foster inclusive growth, also building institutions to ensure political stability and equitable public service delivery.

3- **Invest in social protection systems** that provide protection and equal opportunities across the lifecycle of individuals and ensure access to basic services. **The level of public social spending in Arab countries remains as low as 8 to 10% of GDP compared to 14.2% in other Emerging Markets.**

To be able to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to which they have committed by 2030, governments will need to substantially invest **an additional 5.3% of GDP** in social expenditure and significantly improve their spending's efficiency **which, ceteris paribus, could close one-third of the HDI gap.**

4- **Create fiscal space through more prudent macro-fiscal policies.** Countries may not need necessarily to spend more on social policies, but to spend better to ensure fiscal sustainability and keep their fiscal ratios manageable. **Lebanon is one of them.**

This can be supported by budget and spending reviews, whether at the level of institutions and spending units or across the public sector at large. Spending reviews are tools that help enhance financial resilience, achieve prudent, effective, and efficient financial management and improve financial governance and accountability. They provide a clear understanding of risk and waste areas of spending, allow to estimate financing gaps, and provide indications on possible adjustments and reallocations. Spending reviews have the power to inform expenditure reallocation across government.

5- **Shift public policies towards prevention rather than only response** so that development processes interact more efficiently with security, diplomacy, mediation, and other efforts to prevent conflicts from becoming violent. In its "Pathways for Peace", the UN finds that a scaled-up system for preventive action would save between US\$5 billion and \$70 billion per year, which could be reinvested in reducing poverty and improving the wellbeing of populations. But prevention work also requires from governments to invest in skills of forecasting, prospective, empathy and emotional intelligence of public officials.

Financing for development that contributes to the enjoyment of all Human Rights

Sustainable Development that contributes to the enjoyment of all Human Rights cannot be achieved without reshaped national and subnational financing.

Since Monterrey, in 2002, the discussions were no longer centred on Official Development Assistance from the Global North to the Global South, but rather on enhancing domestic resource mobilization to the benefit of greater equality.

In the Arab region, three imperatives for solving the financing dilemma:

1. **First, building new frameworks for mobilizing needed resources to achieve the development goals.** This requires us to address tough questions such as tax (improve efficiency, equity and revenues); questions such as subsidy reforms, rationalizing military, illicit financial flows, and International flows, including official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), intraregional investment and remittances
2. **Second, building a new narrative on public financial management.** Addressing tough questions such as corruption, conflict of interest, bid rigging, collusion, elite capture, beneficial ownership, etc. Public money management reform is iterative. Pursuing, hand in hand fiscal and governance reforms are primordial.
3. **Third, questioning the effectiveness of development financing.** I mean by that asking questions such as: what happens to the imperatives of 'ownership' and 'alignment' when governments are themselves (wilfully or otherwise) marginalizing certain groups? Are results frameworks up to-scratch? Is data sufficient or sufficiently disaggregated? Etc.

Principles of Effective Governance

These great transformations call for bold decisions that can be carried through only when those who are governed feel included and at the centre of interest of those who govern.

1. A quick look at the region's Governance Indicators shows that they've been on the decline for the past 25 years across MENA, especially the ones related to Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Rule of Law. And we all know that exclusion from access to power, opportunity, services, and security creates fertile ground for violence, especially in areas with weak state capacity or legitimacy or in the context of human rights abuses. In most countries, the citizens are under the impression that the "State" has failed.

There is no sustainable development without efficient, responsive and inclusive institutions. But public sector reforms needed to achieve the SDGs remain a major and vexing challenge in many countries.

2. In July 2018, the UN ECOSOC endorsed a set of 11 Voluntary Principles for Effective Governance prepared by the UN CEPA and UN DESA with a view to providing a baseline future policy and practice and encouraging the study of more specific issues in public administration.
3. The Eleven Principles are intended to clarify the Governance Agenda taking into account different governance structures, national realities, capacities and levels of development while respecting national policies and priorities. These principles aim to mitigate the risk of seeing the SDGs' implementation being inconsistent and ineffective.
4. They are classified into 3 rubrics: (1) Effectiveness (competence, sound policy making, collaboration), (2) Accountability (integrity, transparency, independent oversight) (3) Inclusiveness (leaving no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity and intergenerational equity). And
5. Every principle is associated to a number of commonly used strategies (62 in total) and to a subset of indicators derived from the global indicator framework for the SDGs to help their operationalization.

I invite the audience to consult them.

An excellent example of how these principles work in respect to Climate change is the principle of **Intergenerational equity**: *to promote prosperity and quality of life for all, institutions should construct administrative acts that balance the short-term needs of today's generation with the longer-term needs of future generations.*