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### High-level political forum on sustainable development

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Item 2 of the provisional agenda\*

**Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the  
decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**

### **Input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region**

#### **Note by the Secretariat**

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region, prepared by the Economic and Social Committee for Western Asia, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

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\* E/HLPF/2020/1.



## **Input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region**

### **Introduction**

The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development is the main regional mechanism for monitoring progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The annual Arab Forum is organized jointly by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States, which are the region's principal partners driving implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and as part of joint efforts within the United Nations development system, in line with the Secretary-General's call for greater coherence and cooperation within the organization at the regional level. As the Arab Forum is the region's voice at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, its findings carry global weight. Each year, it produces a report containing the key messages to emerge from the regional dialogue on opportunities, challenges and priorities connected with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Every year since 2016, messages from the Arab Forum have been transmitted to the high-level political forum. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the Arab Forum, which was due to be held from 7 to 9 April 2020, has been postponed to a later date that has yet to be decided. Its programme of work will also be updated to include consideration of the challenges arising from the pandemic and its implications for health care, its socioeconomic consequences and its impact on progress towards sustainable development in the Arab region.

This document was drafted in order to convey the region's views to the 2020 high-level political forum, which is due to be held in New York from 7 to 16 July. It contains the key messages drawn from consultations with representatives of the Arab States in the course of two regional workshops on voluntary national reviews organized by ESCWA in conjunction with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations and the League of Arab States.\* Those messages encapsulate the priorities and perceptions of the Arab region regarding the 2030 Agenda, its implementation and how to surmount the challenges facing the region's countries. They focus on follow-up and review at the national level, what States have achieved thus far and the difficulties encountered during the review process and thereafter.

The following messages build on those issued by the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development over the past five years, the commitments agreed upon in consultations between various development partners and the messages transmitted to the high-level political forum every year from 2016 to 2019. The latter have been focused on key challenges that continue to stand in the way of sustainable development in the region: primarily war, political instability and the Israeli occupation of Arab lands. It is underlined yet again in this document that security, peace and an end to the occupation are basic prerequisites for attaining inclusive and just sustainable development and that the support of the United Nations and the international community is needed to achieve those ends.

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\* The regional workshop on voluntary national reviews in the Arab region (Beirut, 10–11 October 2019) and the second workshop on the same subject, the theme of which was strengthening partnerships (Cairo, 26–27 February 2020).

## Key messages

### A. Government approaches and national development plans

1. There has been tangible progress in incorporating the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals into the work of Governments, notably in their institutions and national priorities. Challenges remain, however, with regard to the coordinated development of integrated policies and reassessment of budgets and funding frameworks.
2. Institutionalizing the 2030 Agenda is key to its successful implementation at the national level. Governments need to take responsibility at the highest level for monitoring implementation by establishing dedicated structures, such as ministerial coordination committees, working groups and sectoral and technical committees.
3. The inherent need for an integrated approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda, reflecting the interdependence of the Sustainable Development Goals, means that inter-agency cooperation at various levels is required to harmonize sectoral strategies and align them with the State's overall development strategy. This will enhance policy coordination and consistency across implementation programmes and optimize results and the means of measuring them.
4. Implementing the 2030 Agenda calls for national development plans that reflect its principles and are in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Such plans must be translated into projects and programmes, with their own budgets and funding strategies, to address national priorities.

### B. Principles of the 2030 Agenda: Disaggregated data, gender equality and leaving no one behind

5. The Arab region needs to address shortcomings in its data collection, especially in terms of high-quality disaggregated data that can serve as a basis for inclusive policy-making. This will require building national capacity to gather statistics, conduct periodic surveys, strengthen coordination and cooperation between government bodies and statistics agencies, create and maintain central databases and develop innovative sources of data.
6. In the Arab region, difficulties continue to plague efforts to achieve the inclusive development called for in the 2030 Agenda. A concerted effort must be made to conduct voluntary national reviews, adopt effective tools and mechanisms for pinpointing priority groups, and tailor projects to those most in need, in accordance with the principle of leaving no one behind.
7. A gender equality perspective needs to be woven into the voluntary national review in terms both of process and analytical content. Sustainable Development Goal 5 and the related targets of the other Goals provide a starting point in that regard.

### C. Partnership, accountability and national/local ownership

8. Leaving aside the limited involvement of certain other parties, the voluntary national review process remains largely Government-driven. Broadening involvement requires effective strategies, an enhanced role for local and regional authorities, the building of partnerships with all stakeholders, and work to harmonize views and mechanisms for gathering knowledge, data and information from the perspective of non-governmental development partners.

9. A high degree of credibility and transparency is needed to address the challenges and issues at hand and ensure that no one is left behind. That requires effective and genuine partnerships between Governments and other stakeholders, in particular the private sector, parliament, civil society, think tanks, research centres and charities, at all stages of the development process, from planning through implementation and on to follow-up, review and assessment.

(a) The private sector should embrace the concepts of sustainable development and see the 2030 Agenda as an opportunity to expand into new areas. It will need to develop sustainable products and ways of working, strengthen partnerships, keep pace with policy developments, contribute to stable communities and markets and dovetail its language and goals with those of society;

(b) Parliament has a representative and legislative role to play in the development process. It should oversee the voluntary national review process from beginning to end and hold the executive to its obligations under the 2030 Agenda. It must, therefore, be empowered to play its multifaceted role. The participation of parliamentarians in regional and global follow-up should be facilitated. They should be helped to develop their capacities, form their own development network in the Arab countries and seek technical support from United Nations bodies;

(c) Civil society should be involved in devising sustainable development planning concepts and, thereafter, in national processes of adaptation to the 2030 Agenda. Civil society has a responsibility to ensure that processes are inclusive and reflect diversity in society, and should play a part in implementation, monitoring and assessment. By assessing accountability and evaluating the need for process changes, it can contribute to the development of national guidelines and strategies in order to make them more forward-looking and responsive than their forerunners and more inclusive of all segments of society;

(d) Independence is paramount to enable think tanks and research centres to provide Governments with insight, impartial advice and an array of options upon which to base their decision-making. It is essential to properly fund such centres and provide them with the resources they need to ensure that they can continue to work effectively.

10. Representatives of key groups, including women, young people, the elderly and persons with disabilities, need to be involved in defining the path towards sustainable development. They should, for instance, be fully consulted in a transparent fashion throughout the voluntary national review process.

#### **D. Accelerating implementation, monitoring, assessment and gap identification**

11. Sufficient time should be allocated to conduct voluntary national reviews with due care. The recommendations and guidelines contained in the resulting reports should serve as the basis for forward planning, a reassessment of institutions and partnerships and the creation of a road map for implementing those recommendations.

12. The difficulty with involving non-governmental stakeholders in implementation, monitoring and assessment activities lies in how to establish mechanisms and methodologies that foster openness, transparency and effective partnership.

13. It is important to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and to underline the benefit of broad, nationwide dissemination of the initial voluntary national review.

14. Voluntary national reviews reflect the undertaking by States to implement the 2030 Agenda and are an important tool in assisting them to do so. Rather than rushing

to complete their reviews, States should conduct a self-assessment after submission of their initial one, studying the lessons drawn from that first experience and applying them in subsequent reviews.

15. Regional and global mechanisms, including regional forums, are key to monitoring progress, raising awareness, building capacity, providing technical support and enhancing the exchange of experiences and peer learning. In that connection, ESCWA has set up a network of experts on voluntary national reviews in the Arab countries.

16. There is an ongoing need to hold joint workshops in the region with regional and international stakeholders that can provide the technical support needed to build capacity in Arab countries to address the challenges and obstacles that affect the voluntary national review process and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

## **E. Crisis preparedness and response and looking ahead**

17. The decade of action for the period 2019–2030 provides a powerful incentive to all stakeholders to redouble efforts and mobilize national, regional and international resources in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The initiative was announced in the political declaration, entitled “Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”, that was issued at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in New York on 24 and 25 September 2019.

18. Government institutions need to be developed and equipped, and supported through partnerships, in order to become resilient and able to adapt and respond to emergency situations. For those purposes, inclusive programmes should be in place in the areas of poverty reduction, universal health coverage, social security and employment.

19. It is vital that countries commit themselves to implementing the 2030 Agenda and uphold its principles. Allowing themselves to be guided by those principles and working to achieve the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda will help countries and peoples to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences and to augment their resilience to crises and shocks of any kind.

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