United Nations Development Programme

Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR)

A Guide to POGAR

UNDP-Programme on Governance in the Arab Region
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I. Programme on Governance in the Arab Region

A. Introduction

The Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR) was launched in 2000 by the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP/RBAS) to promote human development in the Arab region through supporting governance reform.

POGAR moved to Beirut in 2002, bringing itself closer to its beneficiary institutions in the Arab region. The relocation facilitated access to regional actors, reduced cost and enabled the Programme to expand its activities and develop its work.

B. Mission

POGAR's mission is to help Arab countries achieve human development by supporting efforts aimed at reforming governance institutions and encouraging good governance practices.

The mission coincides with the emerging international consensus on the importance of good governance and its ability to promote democratic practices, improve institutional efficiency, and support the rule of law. The UNDP has been at the forefront of this growing consensus; it believes that developing capacity for good governance is the primary way to eliminate poverty and promote human development.

In the Arab region, governments, the civil society, and the private sector agree that the level of development attained in the region is far below its financial and human resource potential. Despite some developmental progress that has been achieved over the last three decades, Arab countries still need organized and continuous support to achieve better results. POGAR's mission is to help create this kind of support by providing necessary knowledge and expertises in the field of governance reform.

II. Governance and Human Development

A. Conceptual Framework

Over the last 60 years, the United Nations has put forward a number of principles that have become fundamental to our present understanding of governance and human development and which are essential for the success of related efforts and comprehensive reforms.

Pronounced in UN conventions, declarations, and resolutions, these principles guide POGAR's work and govern its objectives and strategies.

The basic principles are found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), international human rights instruments that followed, and a series of conventions and declarations that address specific areas related to governance — such as the "Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary" (1985), the "Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors" (1990), and the "UN Convention against Corruption" (2003). General Assembly Resolutions also serve as a primary source for POGAR's work; the most important resolutions are G.A. Res. 55/2 (UN Millennium Declaration-2000) and G.A. Res. 55/96 (Promoting and consolidating democracy-2001).

All these documents shape the conceptual framework under which POGAR operates and strives to propagate in its work and activities.

B. The Links between Governance and Human Development

In recent years, governance and human development have become two of the most widely debated issues in the world. The meanings and implications of these concepts and their interrelation have also come to the forefront due to the efforts of a number of international organizations, such as the UNDP. These efforts have brought forth evidence of a strong link between governance and human development.

Human development is defined as the expansion of choices for all people in society, men and women, particularly the poor and vulnerable. Governance is defined as the mechanisms, procedures and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.

Strengthening an enabling environment for human development does not depend on the state alone, but also on the civil society and the private sector. Economic liberalization and the opening of societies require these three actors to coordinate and harmonize efforts in their respective domains because each domain has a unique role in promoting sustainable human development. The state is responsible for public services and establishing and maintaining stable, effective and fair legal frameworks for public and private activity. Civil society is responsible for channelling people's participation in economic and social activities and organizing them into more powerful groups that are capable of influencing public policies. Finally, the private sector is responsible for sharing information and expertise with the state, generating jobs, accomplishing equitable growth, ensuring gender balance, and preserving the environment.

Supporting institutions in the three domains of governance — the state, the civil society and the private sector — will enable each domain to carry out its respective functions properly. The way to support these institutions is by pursuing and encouraging good governance practices.

C. Good Governance: A Catalyst for Human Development

In recent decades, growing evidence of the effect of good governance on human development has begun to emerge. In 1998, the UN Secretary General said that "Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development." Today there is broad-based consensus on the capacity of good governance to encourage economic growth and social cohesion, eliminate poverty, protect human rights and build trust between governments and citizens.

According to the UNDP, good governance promotes the rule of law and is participatory, transparent, accountable, effective and equitable. It ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources.

The Arab region is part of the abovementioned international consensus. After the Sana'a Declaration on democracy and human rights, the Arab leaders adopted the Tunis declaration, which stated, *inter alia*, the Arab leaders' determination to pursue reform and modernization, consolidate democratic practices by enlarging participation in political and public life and fostering the role of all components of the civil society, and adopting comprehensive strategies for development.

A number of Arab civil society organizations convened in Egypt in 2004 and issued the Alexandria Declaration, which articulates a vision for political, economic, social and cultural reform. The private sector did the same in 2004, when the Arab Business Council, comprising representatives from the private sectors of all the Arab countries, presented a plan for reform in Marrakech, which included visions of economic liberalization and development.

The political will among Arab governments, civil society and the private sector has ripened due to the increasing awareness of the importance of good governance and its role in helping the region fulfil the potential of its financial and human resources.

III. Governance and Human Development in the Arab Region

A. Status of Human Development in the Arab Region

According to the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), which was developed in 1990, Arab countries present a very heterogeneous picture with respect to human development. But taken as a whole, the value of the HDI for the Arab countries was lower than the global average throughout the period from 1980 to 1999.

The level of human development varies among Arab countries. The difference between the most developed and the least developed within the Arab region is close to the respective gap internationally. As a whole, the Arab region outperformed sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia on the overall Human Development Index (HDI) and on indicators of overall health and educational attainment. The region also matched the levels of East

Asia and the Pacific during the 1980s, but fell slightly behind them in the 1990s. The Arab region has yet to reach current levels of human development attained by East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Economically, the Arab region witnessed strong growth during the second half of the 1970s, followed by a very sharp drop between 1982 and 1990. As a result, some countries embarked on reform programmes. This drive towards reform continued during the 1990s, producing modest growth rates, but the Arab countries remained short of harvesting the full potential of their financial and human resources, and their overall performance remained unsatisfactory when compared to other developing regions like Asia or Latin America. The Alexandria Declaration diagnosed the Arab predicament as one of declining economic growth rates, compared to international levels, along with a declining share in international trade and foreign capital flows, a failure to generate jobs, and increasing poverty rates.

B. Status of Governance in the Arab Region

Assessing the status of governance is an intricate issue that requires identifying the major aspects of the concept, which are identified as: (1) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; (2) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and (3) the respect of the citizens and the state for the institutions that govern political, economic and social interaction.

Performance varies among Arab countries, but the general status of governance practices is not encouraging, especially when compared to other developing countries that have been able to achieve impressive progress in a short time. Arab governance institutions require support in improving efficiency and conforming to the rule of law. There is a clear problem in the areas of transparency and accountability and a deficiency in anticorruption policies and their implementation. Participation in public life is low and hindered by several legal and structural obstacles. Arab women are often unable to fulfil their potential or fully participate in the political, economic, social and cultural domains.

IV. Objective and Focus Areas

A. Objective

POGAR derives its objective from UNDP's policy, which perceives good governance as the most important means to promote overall human development. By focusing on Arab countries, POGAR insures that each country's circumstances and priorities are taken into consideration when adopting mechanisms and procedures intended to encourage good governance within.

POGAR's objective is to support internal efforts aimed at achieving political, economic and social reform through building knowledge and encouraging good governance

practices in the state, civil society and the private sector in order to allow internal reform that is tailored to the needs of Arab societies and rooted in their convictions.

B. Focus Areas

POGAR focuses on three main pillars of good governance: (1) the rule of law; (2) transparency and accountability; and (3) participation. It strives to build knowledge and capacity in these three fields, which are also interrelated.

1. **The Rule of Law:** Establishing the rule of law requires supporting comprehensive laws, a well functioning judicial system and effective law enforcement agencies. It is a fundamental pillar of good governance because it ensures fairness, stability and predictability, clearly articulates obligations and effectively protects human rights. Based on this, the Programme focuses on two themes: (a) laws and constitutions and (b) the judicial sector (including courts, judges, public prosecutors, lawyers, and judicial police).

2. **Transparency and Accountability:** Transparency and accountability are two separate concepts, which have been combined under one pillar because they are closely connected. Accountability cannot be effective and objective without transparency and vice versa. Transparency entails the free flow of information and the making of legally required disclosures. Accountability requires officials in all domains — state, civil society and the private sector — to answer to stakeholders on the disposal of their powers and duties, act on criticisms or requirements made of them and accept responsibility for failure, incompetence or fraud. Based on this, the Programme focuses on two themes: (a) parliaments and other regulatory authorities (including issues of anticorruption); and (b) public sector management (including public finance and administration).

3. **Participation:** Participation is a fundamental pillar of good governance; it is essential for open and democratic societies. Participation allows all members of society to be a part of the decision-making process, especially those who are least empowered. Effective participation requires supporting legitimate representative institutions and empowering organizations in civil society with a special focus on women and the poor. Based on this, the Programme focuses on three themes: (a) gender and citizenship; (b) civil society and media; and (c) elections.

V. Strategy and Tools

A. Strategy

POGAR's strategy comprises four parts that have been adopted to support internal powers of reform, encourage positive change, and effectively promote human development in the Arab region.

1. **Listening to Arab Voices:** POGAR bases its work on international principles and norms, but also relies on national and regional intellectual authorities. POGAR employs political, economic, social and cultural references of the region in the process of capacity building. This enables the Programme to be in touch with the Arab countries' real concerns and needs.

2. **Inclusiveness:** POGAR ensures the inclusion of the state, the civil society and the private sector, focusing on the least empowered groups in any given society. POGAR's strategy ensures that all stakeholders participate in the decision making process and express their interests. It pays special attention to the participation of women and encourages them to exercise their rights in the public domain.

3. **National Priorities:** POGAR focuses on national priorities and acts as a complementary force to governance reform efforts in Arab countries.

4. **Building Networks and Partnerships:** POGAR highlights the importance of building networks and partnerships at the national, regional, and international levels. Such a strategy guarantees the exchange of knowledge and expertise and secures long-term support for governance reform efforts in the region. POGAR employs its good reputation, expertises and networks to help Arab countries form effective and sustainable partnerships with the international community.

B. Tools of Implementation: Building Knowledge and Supporting Reform Efforts

POGAR cooperates with Arab governments and a group of national, regional, and international organizations to support and encourage good governance in the Arab region. It implements its goal and strategy through (a) building knowledge and awareness and (b) supporting governance reform measures through supporting activities and projects that encourage good governance practices. Implementation may either focus on one pillar — such as the rule of law, transparency and accountability, or participation — or on more than one pillar, depending on the initiative's goals and vision.

VI. POGAR: Activities and Achievements

A. Building Knowledge and Disseminating Information

POGAR realizes that the Arab region suffers from a deficiency in knowledge and information, as stated in AHDR (2002), especially in the governance fields where studies

and related literature are very scarce. It seeks to remedy this deficiency through encouraging research and facilitating access to information.

POGAR organizes, or contributes to the organization of, several meetings and workshops a year to build knowledge and keep different stakeholders informed on the latest governance-related developments in the region and the world. It has translated, commissioned and published several studies covering issues such as legislative drafting, public prosecutors, electoral processes, judicial structures, women's rights, corruption, and a variety of other topics.

In addition to supporting a number of websites and building a variety of databases (see below at VI B 1), POGAR maintains its own website (www.undp-pogar.org), which provides resources and information on governance reform in Arab countries, including general and country-specific essays, related publications, empirical studies, statistics, searchable databases and valuable web links, in addition to information on POGAR's activities and collaborating institutions.

B. Initiatives and Projects

POGAR organized a number of conferences, meetings and workshops in collaboration with a variety of national, regional and international institutions and organizations. It has also launched a number of projects and initiatives that may be categorized under one of POGAR's focus areas. These projects and initiatives were launched after lengthy consultations and in close coordination with beneficiary institutions.

1. **The Rule of Law:**
   - **Project on the Modernization of Public Prosecution Offices:** POGAR supports a project aimed at modernizing public prosecution offices in four pilot countries (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Yemen). The project was launched in Cairo in May 2005; it aims at supporting public prosecutors in their role, with a focus on capacity building and human rights issues and building a positive relationship with civil society organizations and a functional network of practioners at the regional and international level.
   - **The Arab Centre for the Development of the Rule of Law and Integrity (ACRLI):** POGAR supported the founding of ACRLI in 2004, a regional NGO headquartered in Beirut. The centre is the first of its kind in the Arab region. It focuses on issues of integrity and the rule of law and conducts related research. Among the tasks to be accomplished is a project aimed at reintegrating the Iraqi judicial sector into the Arab region.
   - **GfD initiative – Theme V – The Role of Judiciary and Law Enforcement:** As a part of the GfD initiative (see below under "Transparency and Accountability"), POGAR supports activities under Theme V which addresses the role of the judiciary and law

enforcement in public governance reform. The theme, which is one of six, is chaired by Jordan and co chaired by the United States and France.

- **Legal Databases:** POGAR realizes the importance of facilitating access to legal information; as a result it has collaborated with a number of institutions to produce five legal databases (in Arabic) which have been posted on the internet enabling free and full access to their contents. POGAR produced a database on banking laws of Arab countries, a database on laws regulating legislative bodies, a database on financial regulation and control, a database on Egyptian legislation and Jurisprudence, and is currently in the process of producing a database on Iraqi laws.

2. **Transparency and Accountability:**
- **Initiative on Good Governance for Development in the Arab Countries (GfD):** POGAR launched the G*f*D initiative in 2005 in partnership with the OECD. The goal is to strengthen the capacity of Arab countries in designing and implementing policies of public governance reform in a way that creates an enabling environment conducive to development and growth, through a focused, comprehensive and inclusive process. The initiative focuses on six themes: the civil service and integrity; the role of the judiciary and enforcement of judgments; e-government, administrative simplification and regulatory reform; the role of civil society and the media in the reform of the public sector; governance of public finance; and public private partnership and service delivery.
- **GfD Initiative – Theme IV – Public Service Delivery, Public-Private Partnership, and Regulatory Reform:** As part of the GfD initiative, POGAR supports activities under Theme IV which addresses the issue of public service delivery and means to improve it in terms of quality, quantity, and cost. It also addresses public private partnerships and regulatory reform to improve service delivery in the Arab region. The theme is chaired by Tunisia and co chaired by the UK.
- **Parliaments:** POGAR is cooperating with the Global Programme on Parliamentary Strengthening (GPPS) to support Arab parliaments in their capacity as regulators of public and private domains. It supports a series of events aimed at building knowledge and capacity in related fields with a focus on women participation. It also supports a series of activities related to the parliaments' role in fighting corruption.

3. **Participation:**
- **Initiative on Gender and Citizenship:** POGAR supports this initiative in partnership with the International Development Research

centre (IDRC). It is aimed at building knowledge in the field of women's citizenship rights. The preliminary phase ended in 2002 with the designation of strategic focuses. The first phase focused on issues related to naturalization and citizenship. The second phase will follow up and cover issues related to media training and knowledge management.

- **GfD initiative – Theme VI – Citizens, Civil Society and Public Sector Reform:** As a part of the GfD initiative, POGAR supports activities under GfD theme VI which addresses the role of citizens and civil society organizations in public sector reform. The theme is chaired by Lebanon and co chaired by the European Union.

- **Media Reform in the Arab Region:** POGAR supports efforts aimed at supporting an independent public media in the Arab Region. It supports the formulation and adoption of a platform for media reform focus on the establishment of an independent media service in the region that addresses the right of citizens to have access to objective and impartial information. Strengthening Media-Civil Society Relations is also on of the goals of POGAR's activities in the area of media reform. Several meetings have been organized to encourage the discussion of relevant themes, such as freedom of the press and freedom of information.

- **Elections and Electoral Processes:** POGAR supports electoral reform in the Arab region with a focus on strengthening the effectiveness and fairness of Arab Electoral Processes. A regional meeting was held in March 2006 to assess the latest electoral experiences in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. POGAR's work in this area is aimed at promoting the management of impartial participatory electoral systems and processes, and seeks to improve the administration of elections in the Arab region.

4. **Human Rights:** POGAR also supports efforts to promote human rights and build knowledge and capacity in related fields. Its work in this area is rather a cross-cutting theme under which POGAR collaborates with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR). One of the achievements is the implementation of PARDHUR, a project aimed at building related national and regional capacity in the Arab countries.

For more information:

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