



**POST-PROJECT EVALUATIONS
FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND**

**UNDEF Funded Project / UDF-14-599-RAS
Mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals
in the Arab Civil Society Agenda**

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluator. They do not represent those of UNDEF or any of the institutions referred to in the report

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I. Overall Assessment

This report is an evaluation of the project “Mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Civil Society Agenda”. The project was implemented by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) between February 1, 2016, and January 31, 2018. After an initial one-month extension, a formal three-month no-cost extension was approved on February 22, 2018. The final end date of the project was April 30, 2018.

The project’s overall development goal was to “contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic situation in Arab countries through the enhancement of an inclusive social dialogue at the policymaking level”. The specific objective was to “promote an inclusive social dialogue in Arab societies in the wake of the new sustainable development agenda”.

Through this project, ANND sought to demonstrate engagement of civil society organization (CSO) coalitions at the global, regional and national levels in public debates on the new sustainable development agenda, and improve strategic partnerships with trade unions, parliaments, academia and the private sector. The project aimed at:

- publishing an analytical report on socio-economic reform initiatives in the Arab world,
- organizing five national multi-stakeholder dialogues in five Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia), and
- creating a website dedicated to monitoring sustainable development goal (SDG) implementation in the region.

In addition, the project was intended to:

- produce a training package to foster the engagement of different stakeholders in the SDG agenda that would be tested and validated at a regional workshop and training of trainers,
- use the package for workshops in the five countries to enhance national dialogues on the sustainable development agenda, and
- develop regional policy recommendations based on these national dialogues.

Finally, the project aimed at increased sharing of information on the sustainable development agenda through the leverage of press releases and active social media engagement in order to raise the awareness of the general public with regard to the SDGs.

In terms of achievement, the project exceeded the initially-set targets. Across the five countries of implementation, more than ten organizations engaged in mainstreaming the SDGs into their own agendas and enhancing discussion on the implementation of the SDGs / Agenda 2030 at a national level. ANND also produced more than a dozen statements and other materials addressing inequitable policies, which were disseminated through their network. ANND also used other projects’ activities to optimize the visibility of SDGs for stakeholders and policymakers. More than 50 CSOs, labor groups and trade unions, and even businesses

participated in the project's activities and engaged in debates around the Agenda 2030, and more than ten organizations were involved in producing the outputs of the project. Actions in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco were organized to influence policy change according to the SDGs, and more than three sets of recommendations were developed, disseminated and advocated for.

Key recommendations are mostly related to continuing to build on the decade-long experience of ANND in terms of lessons learned on sustainability and increasing local accountability and ownership through improved strategic communication between ANND and its members and partners.

As for lessons learned, the project demonstrated that many (but not all) Arab governments are not genuinely committed to the vision of the 2030 Agenda and its approach of partnership between civil society and government. Achieving the SDGs will require holistic approaches to reform and policymaking rather than siloed efforts to achieve specific quantitative targets.

II. Project Context

(i) Development Context

Over several years, the implementation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Arab region was encouraged and supported by various UN agencies. While some progress has been achieved, notably towards meeting the education goals, the Arab MDGs report published by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) outlines major challenges, and makes clear that States failed to promote inclusive development: "Countries are now faced with tackling socioeconomic development challenges in order to pursue economic growth, social justice and equity and to address the aspirations of citizens".

However, with slow progress around social, economic and cultural targets and a lack of democratic practices such as public and political participation, the Arab region started witnessing waves of protests leading up to the "Arab spring" in 2011. These popular uprisings were reactions to long periods of compounded political repression, economic and social marginalization, large income and asset inequalities and severe human rights violations across swathes of society.

This continued failure of the policy agenda to confront the region's deep-rooted socio-economic problems was reflected and accurately described in the project document's context and problem analysis sections. Several years following the uprisings, States mostly continue to mis-address or even ignore the crucial need for sustainable development policies and reform priorities that need to be collectively agreed upon through a locally-driven dialogue involving key stakeholders.

In fact, CSOs in the Arab region have long struggled against national social and economic policy choices that conflict with or hinder pathways towards sustainable development. In addition, there are legal frameworks and government agendas that continue to impede SDG implementation in the Arab region. Unfortunately, state policies are often influenced by private international interests or bound to regional or international agreements that do not reflect local public interests or SDG principles. The efforts of CSOs toward achieving SDGs such as poverty reduction (SDG 1), fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8), and reducing societal inequality (SDG 10) are impeded by these ongoing political realities and the legal frameworks and political processes that sustain them.

As one of the pioneer networks in the Arab region working on development and policy reform, ANND has had a significant role during the decade preceding adoption of the SDGs in raising awareness, creating coalitions, developing the monitoring skills of local partners around the implementation of the MDGs. ANND supported the launch of national MDG campaigns in 12 countries and has a significant track record in issuing seasoned recommendations to policymakers and other stakeholders. It is in that same vein and based on lessons learned that this project is inscribed, as it sought to use all that foundational work to engage with post-uprising governments in the region on the SDGs.

The internal political and geo-political contexts have played their part in continuously challenging the steady growth of a civil society capable of creating momentum on issues related to socio-economic policy reform. Civil society space in the region is adapting to the changes that vary greatly from one country to the other: while the space has shrunk considerably in Egypt, it is cautiously put to the test in Morocco and Lebanon, and there have been some glimmers of constructive collaboration with governments in Jordan and Tunisia. In Lebanon and Jordan, civil society has also had to prioritize humanitarian programming to respond to the continued war in Syria and millions of refugees present in both countries. The regional civil society space is thus torn between multiple contexts and priorities where policy work remains a constant struggle. At the same time, the regional space continues to offer the unique opportunity for CSOs to reflect on their own contexts, with ANND being one of the rare platforms that actively aim to promote and preserve such space. This project was therefore timely to ensure a fresh approach towards addressing the links between the Agenda 2030, human rights and policy reform across the Arab region and with relevant stakeholders.

(ii) Project Objective and Intervention Rationale

According to the project document, the project “Mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Civil Society Agenda” aimed to “promote an inclusive social dialogue in Arab societies in the wake of the new sustainable development agenda” in order to further “contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic situation in Arab countries through the enhancement of an inclusive social dialogue at the policymaking level”.

Project participants included CSOs, political parties, academics and trade unions. The project had a comprehensive model of implementation which contained two components. The first aimed at providing a space for all project participants to evaluate and discuss socio-economic reform initiatives, especially in the areas of SDG 1 (poverty eradication), SDG 8 (economic growth), and SDG 10 (inequalities), in their respective countries. National reports were discussed through national dialogues organized in each country, and a regional report combining all these analyses was published. The national dialogues were organized over a period of two days and through a collaboration between ANND and one of their local partners.

The second component aimed at developing a guidebook on the new Agenda 2030, containing an explanation of the different goals and targets (SDGs 1, 8, 10 and 16), as well as three different booklets targeting three different types of stakeholders: CSOs, parliamentarians and trade unions. Five capacity development workshops were organized in the different countries following a regional validation workshop.

Over the span of two years, the project's planned activities were:

- Publication of an analytical report (or study) on socio-economic reform initiatives in the Arab world
- Five national multi-stakeholder dialogues in five Arab countries
- A webpage dedicated to monitoring SDG implementation established and actively used
- Production of a training package
- One regional validation and capacity development workshop
- Five capacity development workshops organized in the five project countries
- Developing regional policy recommendations based on the national dialogues

The expected outcomes of the project were:

1. Demonstrated engagement at the global, regional and national levels of CSO coalitions in public debate around the new sustainable development agenda
2. Improved strategic partnerships with trade unions, parliaments, academia and private sector

As mentioned above, the project strategy builds on years of ANND experience in raising awareness and developing the capacity of its network around the region regarding the MDGs. The project's strategy included four main tracks: policy analysis, capacity building, channels for dialogue and outreach. In each country, project beneficiaries participated in each of the tracks. The addition of trade unions, private sector organizations, and universities at all these levels of the project also indicated a willingness for a more inclusive process that would result in more constructive and sustainable outcomes.

III. Methodology

UNDEF's 2017 operational manual for post-project evaluations was the initial reference document to develop the methodology. Basic criteria of constructive process, focus on lessons learned, forward-looking, and comprehensive view of the project's results were respected. Information was collected, analyzed, and is presented in this report according to the OECD – DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. An additional criterion was included aimed at analyzing UNDEF's added-value. The post-project evaluation also aimed at linking evidence-based findings to recommendations.

An international expert designated to conduct the evaluation prepared a preliminary planning note (Launch Note) in October 2018. The Note was based on a review of the following project documentation:

- Project document;
- Mid-term progress and final narrative and financial reports (including annexes);
- Milestone verification reports;
- UNDEF Programme Officer evaluation note; and
- Email correspondence between UNDEF Programme Officer and the grantee.

The evaluator and the grantee then proceeded to hold introductory Skype conversations to develop a schedule of interviews that would take place during the month of October. The evaluation was performed remotely and there was no field mission planned or conducted. During the assignment, the evaluator interviewed through Skype and emails the grantee's current staff, participants in the project activities, partner organizations, government representatives, and one UNDP representative. The full list of people interviewed is presented in Annex 3.

As mentioned in the launch note, the evaluation adopted a transparent, inclusive, participatory (to finalize the list of potential interviewees and through questions that helped guide the development of other evaluation questions to participants) and results-based approach to collect, analyze and report on findings and recommendations. It assessed the rationale and justification for the project as well as the outputs, outcomes and impacts achieved. The evaluator also assessed the sustainability of the intervention including mechanisms and strategies put in place to ensure that the benefits transcend the end of the UNDEF grant. The formulation of questions during the interviews and meetings included a gender-mainstreamed approach at all times, both in terms of project participants and topics of focus and outputs.

IV. Evaluation Findings

(i) Relevance

As mentioned in the development context section, the region's civil society has had shifting priorities depending on national contexts and the difficult-to-manage nexus between humanitarian and development efforts. That is precisely why the objectives and activities of the project were highly relevant. By focusing on the UN's new sustainable development agenda, ANND was able to design and develop the project keeping in line with a long-term regional vision and focus on policy reform, all the while adapting to each context and the needs of stakeholders.

Appropriate and timely project

The Agenda 2030 and SDGs were approved and launched in early 2015. This project was launched a year later and fell in line with the need to raise awareness at regional, national, and local levels of the new sustainable development agenda. This timeliness gave ANND and its members a definite added-value in being among the first actors to initiate this effort.

The model of the project (regional oversight by ANND but led nationally by its members) was based on years-long experience of ANND around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In integrating the previous lessons learned into this new project, the organization was able to develop a strong rationale for a human-rights-based approach to the SDGs and link it to much needed debates on socio-economic policy reforms.

Policy reform and development across a region riddled with instability

After the Arab uprisings and the subsequent changes that occurred in several countries, including wars in Syria and Libya, the space to discuss policy reforms continued to be under threat across the region, if not became inexistent. In war and refugee-affected countries, governments are under pressure to provide relief and assistance to refugees all the while facing disgruntled host communities awaiting development programs themselves. In those countries as in others, austerity policies and structural adjustments requested by International Financial Institutions have also been adopted, contradicting the spirit of the SDGs in general. These policies have so far not been conducive to appropriate implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the Arab region and continue to undermine a common civil society platform to advocate for SDGs and socio-economic reforms. This project's ambitious goal at the national and regional levels aimed at reminding governments and civil society of their responsibilities in terms of policy-making and adherence to the Agenda 2030 targets, despite the difficult contexts they are going through.

Importance of a regional endeavor around the Agenda 2030

As such, the objectives of the project were in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development through the new global sustainable development agenda and were adapted to each country of implementation. More importantly, they pushed through to regional

institutions such as the League of Arab States (LAS), and of course globally, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)¹.

Furthermore, while national contexts may differ, the regional umbrella provided by ANND gave members an essential base to launch their own localized approaches. Providing this platform at the regional level, inclusive of a vision on how to address these expected challenges, provided CSOs with opportunities and also allowed them to interact regularly.

Finally, in terms of themes, as the focus of the organization has been social and economic policies and inequality, it made sense to align the project's activities on specific SDGs (more on the content and selection of SDGs below). ANND and its members' strategic interventions have been consistently re-discussed after the Arab uprisings as well to ensure that experts and other stakeholders are on board with this approach. In addition, the coordination committee, made up of regional experts and members of the network, met twice during the course of the project to address this issue.

Activity and output consistency with intended outcomes

The regional socio-economic report: a first effort towards a unified regional civil society voice

The regional report on socio-economic initiatives in the Arab world that was the first deliverable of this project was prepared through a bottom-up process that started with national reports prepared for Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Egypt. Through their national partners, ANND communicated with national researchers and oversaw the report drafting process to ensure that each used the same methodology and streamlined approaches for a constructive merging into a single regional report.

The guidebook and pamphlets: relevant and timely

Following the socio-economic report and national dialogues, ANND developed a guidebook and pamphlets to help frame practical discussions around the SDGs and to support CSOs aiming to monitor their implementation in their countries. The guidebook includes informative content related to specific SDGs and a regional perspective to their implementation and was described as one of the first successful mergers of human rights and policy reform issues for the Arab world. The guidebook also included separate pamphlets for civil society, parliaments, and trade unions which were described as useful standalone documents that could have been (or still could be in the future) developed into their own publications.

Some participants saw the guidebook as a missed opportunity to be even more practical and closer to a tool for practitioners rather than what they thought was a mix of a constructive recap of existing information merged with ANND's vision on the issues at hand. However, most participants saw the guidebook as being extremely useful as it stands.

¹ The HLPF is an annual platform taking place in July at the UN Headquarters in NY that addresses the implementation of the SDGs and the Agenda 2030.

Online platform (2030monitor.annd.org)

Although ANND designed and delivered an online platform for dissemination of information about the SDGs consistent with their project plans, by their own internal metrics it was not widely accessed or used. The website includes a substantive recap of all the project activities in each country of implementation. Despite the fairly low number of downloads (less than 50 at the time of writing of this report), the website was described as filling an important gap in making Arabic-language information about the SDGs accessible.

Regional policy recommendations

During the course of the project, opportunities to share recommendations at a regional level were taken in conjunction with other ANND activities. This optimization of resources was relevant in that it reduced duplication risks and increased the visibility of the points being made.

In terms of content, the recommendations (best summed up in Annex 18 of the Final Narrative Report summarizing the results of the Arab CSO Forum) are both contextually and technically relevant. They call for improving governments' engagement with CSOs (for example in seeing CSOs as partners in combatting terrorism and in establishing peace), for eradicating poverty by activating accountability mechanisms, providing universal social protection and fair taxation policies, and for implementing and financing Agenda 2030 by establishing national plans, goals, and indicators, as well as specific bodies and forum on sustainable development. Finally, gender equality recommendations stand alone in calling for increased economic and political empowerment of women and for policy reform taking into account gender responsive budgeting.

Risks and assumptions

The project document lists credible risks mostly related to the logistical aspects of the project's implementation and ANND was able to successfully mitigate them. However, the list of risks misses those related to the content of the activities themselves and their acceptance by stakeholders, or risks related to the partners selected for the implementation. Nevertheless, ANND's track record of implementing projects at a regional scale meant that they were able to navigate these challenges. The most relevant example is related to the organization of activities



Flyer promoting the regional workshop held in Beirut in November 2017, that was also supported by Fredrich Ebert Stiftung and the Global Policy Forum (videos [here](#))

in Egypt, where the initial partner was unable to move forward due to the shrinking of civil society space in the country. Even if activities were delayed as a result (and a no-cost extension was requested), ANND's existing relationship with an organization linked to the LAS (the Arab Organization for Human Rights, AOHR) was a strategic solution to this issue, as it also contributed to strengthening collaboration with the LAS itself.

Taking gender and disability into account

Gender and disability issues were taken into account throughout the project implementation, especially with the production of the guidebook which stressed gender and disability inclusion despite the fact (according to the implementers) that the SDGs themselves often do not.

For example, ANND implementing partner the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) were instrumental in ensuring the intersectionality of the guidebook through disability mainstreaming. Since LPHU is also a member of the international NGO Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) and leading its network in the region, they were able to connect with their fellow organizations in the implementing countries to encourage them to participate in the project's activities there.

As for gender equality, the initial document lacks the importance and scope with which gender was considered through the project implementation. Partners such as the New Women Foundation in Egypt for example took an essential role in several activities: contributing to the drafting of the country's socio-economic report, attending and leading a specific session in the national dialogue, and attending and promoting the guidebook in Egypt.

Each national dialogue included sessions related to gender and disability. In addition, and although SDG 5 was not selected as one of the focus SDGs in this project, gender was mainstreamed throughout the guidebook and was the focus of a stand-alone chapter with disability. The chapter included a review of SDG 5, other targets from other SDGs that mention gender, targets from different SDGs that relate to disabled people, an analysis of the challenges facing their implementation in the region.

(ii) Effectiveness

The project was effective; all objectives described in the project document were met and in some cases target indicators were exceeded. Participants in the various activities organized by ANND upgraded their skills and knowledge of the SDGs and Agenda 2030.



Capacity development workshop in Egypt, March 2018

Egypt

As mentioned earlier, the difficult internal climate in Egypt led to planning activities with AOHR and linking these efforts with their ongoing engagement with the League of Arab States. While it seems that this delay and the issues related to the implementation of the activities could have been anticipated, the solution found turned out to be an efficient and beneficial approach to ensuring constructive implementation of all project activities and ensure their sustainability. A long report of the guidebook validation workshop was [produced](#) that detailed the contents of the sessions and included a recap of the post-workshop evaluation that seemed to show a high level of appreciation by the participants.

Jordan

Activities in Jordan were very successful because Jordanian civil society organizations engaged a government that was a willing partner and wanted to benefit from the relative experience and expertise of the NGOs, especially at the eve of their VNR in 2017. The two-day capacity development workshop in Amman also included UN bodies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Jordan office as well as a number of human rights experts, with more than 50 participants in each session including representatives from the ministries of labor and social welfare.



National Dialogue in Jordan

Lebanon

Project activities in Lebanon were successful thanks in large part to the positive engagement of civil society and trade unions, though relations between these stakeholders and the government have been slightly tense. Engagement and dialogue from government actors tended to vary but remained very



Regional validation workshop

limited due to the political deadlock in the country and the lack of commitment in developing a government framework for the implementation of the SDGs (agenda of the national dialogue event [here](#) and picture from one of the sessions above). Furthermore, NGOs selected to take part in the national delegation of Lebanon to the VNR process were seen as not being inclusive and representative of civil society in the country. Nonetheless, project activities were characterized as helping to “build bridges” between government and civil society, with government officials acknowledging the need for more consultation and partnership when deciding on SDG targets and priorities.

Morocco

The activities in Morocco were organized by Espace Associatif, a prominent local NGO, in partnership with ESCWA which sent two staff from Lebanon to assist in implementation, indicating a high interest by stakeholders to increase the engagement of Moroccan civil society in the 2030 Agenda process.

The validation workshop seemed to be more formal and looked more like a training rather than a national dialogue and included representatives from trade and agriculture unions, universities, local civil society, and government. The guidebook was presented at a meeting attended by representatives from government, civil society (including human rights – as well as the national human rights institute, the CNDH – and feminist organizations), and other stakeholders but was criticized as lacking *local* ownership and buy-in. In addition, a presentation made by a Moroccan government official was viewed as technocratic and lacking in concrete data.



Screenshot from social media for the Morocco workshop

Nonetheless, the event was seen as a successful and dynamic discussion which generated momentum for future activities. There was appetite to continue with sectoral and geographic trainings, but additional funding to cover these trainings was not secured.

Tunisia

The national dialogue in Tunisia (report of the event [here](#)) was organized by the Social Sciences Forum in collaboration with the Observatoire Tunisien de l’Economie, which wrote the country report. The report drafter stated that she received serious criticism but that this led to better framing of the main issues and was a positive outcome. Some participants of the Tunisian national dialogue suggested that the criticism was stronger coming from economists and

individuals close to the current government, mainly regarding the methodology of the report that was drafted by a sociologist. Despite these different perspectives, the fact that the national dialogue allowed for such a debate to take place is in itself consistent with the intended objective and relevance of the activity.

In addition, more than 50 participants from government, academia, and civil society took part in the capacity development workshop, including representatives from trade associations that normally compete with one another for membership. The wide range of participation and frank exchange of views ensure that these were impactful events. In addition, the trainers were seen as highly effective and able to successfully motivate participants.



Capacity development workshop in Tunisia, December 2017

However, one of the trainers felt that a number of key civil society organizations in Tunisia were not present and expressed surprise, especially given that ANND has a strong local network. The trainer felt that the lack of participation by prominent civil society organizations was a missed opportunity.

(iii) Efficiency

The budget as implemented enabled the project to meet its objectives. There was a reasonable relationship between these inputs and the project's outputs.

Partnerships and internal M&E with partners and host organizations

ANND successfully established partnerships with several organizations across the region to implement this project, as would be expected given the nature and track record of ANND as a network made of up civil society organizations across the Arab world. Their partners in Egypt, Jordan and Morocco notably reported successful relationships based on shared strategic interests. Local consultations and workshops were convened in cooperation with ANND's local partners to develop and then validate all project deliverables.

All selected partners in the course of this project are known to have track record and internal accountability mechanisms to ensure appropriate management of costs. In addition, ANND's finance team made sure that all receipts related to all activities were submitted, reviewed and approved before dispensing reimbursements. ANND also made efforts to ensure a presence of an ANND staff or consultant in all activities for internal monitoring. However, the project manager was unable to attend activities herself and this may have been a missed opportunity for comprehensive internal monitoring and evaluation on the quality consistency and content.

Financial management structure

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the implementing partners provided an institutional framework for cost-effectiveness and accountability. ANND's track record in regional projects provided a strong base for this project. Payments for activities taking place were divided into two installments: one prior to the activity of 30% of the estimated total cost of the activity and another following submission of a financial report and supporting documents. Receipts were requested and archived by ANND from each country of implementation and no release of the final installment was made without ensuring an accurate reimbursement of expenses. The estimated budget was discussed and initially approved by both the partners and ANND, and all parties were satisfied with this agreements and way of working with ANND.

Project activities and co-funding

Budget lines were respected, and project activities took place in a cost-efficient way. Expenses were reasonable and were all linked to a logical thought process. As for the co-funding element, activities were crafted in a way to optimize the resources and objectives of all ANND activities. As a result, activities were stronger, more visible, and more sustainable in each country. For example, some of the national dialogues from this project were co-funded by the International Trade Union Confederation as trade unions were invited and participated in these events, and as a result these stakeholders continued to engage with ANND on another regional projects² on the implementation of SDGs.

(iv) Impact

Production of base materials in the Arab region on Agenda 2030

The base materials produced on Agenda 2030 by ANND were universally seen as a relevant and helpful basis for Arab civil society and other stakeholders to understand the SDGs. The local and regional socio-economic reports were an important and useful tool to ensure the coordination and amplification of civil society voices on SDG-related issues.

The SDG guidebook was described as a document that would be useful for many years to come. ANND took an approach to developing the guidebook that focused on themes that link various SDGs rather than describing each SDG separately. This was described as a "brilliant" approach by one stakeholder to weaving the SDGs together and avoiding a siloed approach to each SDG. Partners in Jordan felt that the manual helped encourage civil society and government to work together to achieve the SDGs. In Egypt, civil society is using those outputs as entry points to engage with the government for the "Egypt 2030" plan through the SDGs while mitigating risks over their capacity to operate. In Tunisia, the manual was seen as helping to shape future

² The project called "Solid – South Med Social Dialogue" aims to develop the capacity of Trade Unions and their homologues of Employers' Associations in Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco, in order to promote a dynamic, inclusive and reinforced institutionalized social dialogue and consultations with the broader civil society.

strategy and explain the thinking of various stakeholders with regard to several key issues. However, there was a concern that after the project implementation period ended, no further follow-up or discussion was apparently forthcoming. A similar concern was echoed in Morocco, where the interviewed partner agreed that the manual was helpful but stated that without additional resources and support it was unlikely that it would continue to be used. Another criticism was that the manual and related pamphlets were never translated into English, though of course the key project goal was to make information available in Arabic.

Improved networking with government representatives around HLPF engagement

One of the key expected outcomes of this project was improved networking between Arab civil society and government representatives on the SDGs, and in this regard the project was broadly successful. ESCWA worked with ANND to organize an Arab Forum for Sustainable Development which served as a preparatory meeting for civil society organizations to formalize their inputs into the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. This event seems to have become a regular fixture in collaborating with the LAS on Agenda 2030.

As mentioned in the effectiveness section, each country's dynamics resulted in varying degrees of engagement with governments. ANND's partners from Jordan traveled to New York to participate in the VNR and meet with Jordanian officials, including Members of Parliament who had participated in earlier project activities in Jordan. The national delegation's civil society selection even included some of these partners. Government and civil society representatives also participated in a joint side event which was seen as a major success coming out of this project. In Morocco the outcome was slightly mixed, as Morocco hosted the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP22) in 2017 but did not include a major component for civil society or SDG engagement. Partners mentioned the issue of government and some within civil society as confusing the SDGs with the COP agenda and actions, undermining a more general approach. As part of Morocco's VNR that year, several local and national civil society consultation workshops were organized but one partner criticized these workshops as not being inclusive enough (especially of rural NGOs) and given enough time for constructive consultations.

A positive collaboration between civil society and government in Jordan

In Jordan, the drafted report was used to advocate before government officials, including a Vice-Minister in charge of SDG implementation who consulted extensively with the report drafters and supported consultations among Jordanians as well as Syrian refugees. The drafting of the national report was also participatory, as other local Jordanian CSOs including the Justice Center for Legal Aid took part in the drafting of the report and developed advocacy in line with its conclusions; the report was perceived as professional and objective by the government and civil society. The relevance of this exercise came to fruition during the government's preparation for their Voluntary National Review (VNR) during the 2017 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), where civil society's input was considered an asset.

Impact on participants

All participants interviewed for this evaluation noted a positive impact on their knowledge and programming in their respective organizations. Most noted that the impact of the activities is long-term rather than short-term, as the events allowed for further debates and discussions between key individuals and stakeholders. ANND continues its engagement (and that of its members) with the HLPF in New York on a yearly basis and participants noted their involvement at that level as a result of project activities.

Since the project activities were among the first in each country to raise awareness on SDGs and the Agenda 2030, several participants noted that they stepped up their work around the topic and developed new projects (and proposals) in this sense. For example, the Tunisian Social Science Forum encouraged other NGOs to work on the SDGs and developed a "[Social Dignity Index](#)" that further localizes the monitoring of the implementation of SDGs at the municipal level.

(v) Sustainability

A long-term vision already articulated in ANND's mandate and network

ANND continues to be one of the very few regional organizations with the reach and capacity to organize these types of activities and to inspire local organizations to take on the work at their level. Their track record and exposure to other stakeholders beyond civil society, especially with trade unions, think tanks and academic institutions create long-term added-value.

Since the project ended, the same components and activities were extended to three new countries: Palestine, Sudan and Syria. This indicates that the model used was successful enough to be replicated, and that there is a need and enthusiasm from the respective civil societies to address the 2030 Agenda in their countries.

As for the materials that were published in the course of the project, ANND's Project Manager stated that ANND and its partner organizations have continued to use the guidebook as a reference document beyond the project's end. Indeed, ANND took care not to make the guidebook or subject-matter booklets time-bound, allowing them to continue to be used. Civil society organizations throughout the region will be able to make use of the reference documents through the e-platform to share knowledge, experience, and build capacity and engage in Agenda 2030 Voluntary National Reviews accordingly. Already there are plans to roll-out the booklets in the countries that will be subject to review in 2019, including Algeria, Tunisia, Kuwait, Mauritania, and Oman. There are additionally other opportunities to continue sharing project deliverables, such as the guidebook that was also used during a meeting organized by the UNDP Regional Bureau in Amman from 29 – 30 October 2018 and distributed to all attendees.

More importantly, ANND's vision on a regional engagement around Agenda 2030 culminated in the set-up of an annual Arab CSO forum in partnership with five other regional networks³. This CSO regional forum, which intends to be permanent but has yet to be fully institutionalized, has been instrumental in the unifying civil society voices around Agenda 2030 and in providing a preparatory space prior to the ESCWA-mandated "Arab Forum for Sustainable Development"⁴. For example, the 2018 CSO Forum brought together more than 60 CSO representatives to adopt 3 outcome documents and 10 key messages that were used in the regional review. The 2019 CSO Forum is already under preparation and it seems that all partners are strongly committed to ensure its sustainability. Another annual CSO Forum with similar objectives is also being organized ahead of the LAS Economic and Social Summit.

While the working group mentioned under output 2.3 was not formally created, the focal points and partners from the national dialogues have been kept informed about possible activities and continued engagement at the regional and international levels, especially in view of the HLPF 2019 review (in which Tunisia, among other countries, will be presenting its VNR).

Addressing SDG implementation remains a priority for ANND and there are discussions to consider developing a "summer school" type of capacity development around the 2030 Agenda that would be more institutional and therefore sustainable. As for ANND's partners and members, those who participated in this project are leading the work on SDGs in their respective countries and are even contributing to the training of other NGOs in new countries.

Varied prospects of sustainability depending on the country and at a regional level

Several participated noted their ability to receive funding for projects around the 2030 Agenda following their participation in this project, while others are still struggling to secure support for their ideas. For example, a Tunisian partner was able to mobilize some resources to engage with municipalities on some Agenda 2030 indicators. The Social Dignity Index developed by the Social Science Forum is a continuation of this work. Participants also noted their engagement at the HLPF in New York and their growing ability to think about organizing side-events or influencing (even taking part of) their national delegations.

The prospects of sustainability also depend on the government's commitment to work on implementing the SDGs. In Lebanon for example, the opportunities are extremely limited due to the current political deadlock as a cabinet has yet to be formed since the last legislative elections of May 2018. Lebanon's VNR in July 2018 was presented but drew criticism from civil society. However, there are avenues of engagement that ANND and its partners took forward,

³ The Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC), the Arab Women Center for Training and Research (CAWTAR), the Arab chapters of Transparency International, Disabled Peoples' International and Habitat International.

⁴ ESCWA, like all Regional Commissions, has the mandate to organize annual, regional, multi-stakeholder forums, known as Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, as the main regional mechanisms for Follow-Up and Review reporting to the HLPF. The report of the Arab Forum is then presented at the HLPF.

in organizing events about the SDGs and policy-making within the parliament, rather than with the government.

In other countries such as Morocco or Tunisia, while the governments are interested in engaging on the SDGs, they may be doing so without a comprehensive and inclusive approach according to some project participants, especially given the unending social tensions and unrest in some regions. One of the participants even mentioned: “when the government has an international partner, they are under pressure to be inclusive, but when they don’t, they don’t bother”, indicating that the VNR process is more about preparing a positive presentation than undergoing a critical exercise.

Finally, the constructive links that have been built over the years and strengthened thanks to this project’s activities with the UN’s ESCWA and the LAS can contribute to an improved leveraging of influence towards governments in ensuring that national plans are set-up in an inclusive and participatory manner.

(vi) UNDEF Added Value

There was a clear added value to UNDEF funding. As mentioned by multiple project stakeholders, several UN agencies are working on implementation of specific SDGs separately, leaving civil society activists and government officials to find it difficult to prioritize or identify a nexus among all these different initiatives. ANND was able to avoid these issues because the UNDEF grant supported a holistic and rights-based approach to the SDGs, promoting partnerships and cross-cutting initiatives. By taking this approach, a strong synergy was created between the UN-ESCWA and the UNDEF-funded project, where the Regional Commission contributed to several of the project’s activities at the national and regional levels.

In addition, the presence of a UN logo on project materials seems to have enhanced the credibility of the project. Stakeholders mentioned the value of UNDEF as a donor that is based in Headquarters, as opposed to the national offices of other UN agencies. The importance of this distinction lays in the fact that the grant-making process is different and that the UNDEF office is independent from the regional commission and main UN bodies dealing with following-up on SDG implementation such as ESCWA and UNDP.

Implementing a project funded by the UN also facilitates prospects when inviting government members who are weary of some specific funding that may be interpreted as politicized. One consultant mentioned her refusal to work on projects funded by a specific government aid agency and highly appreciated UNDEF’s looking into this aspect or consequence of their funding.

As for UNDEF’s visibility, all documents and materials reviewed by the evaluator showed an appropriate use of the UNDEF logo, from the publications to the simple activity reports. Several hyperlinks and pictures throughout this report refer to examples.

V. Conclusions

- (i) *The project was extremely relevant in the current context of the region.* By focusing on linking the global sustainable development agenda with policy reform debates in the region, ANND was able to anchor the interest of a part of civil society and government entities in these thematic priorities and link them to the competing short-term priorities related to peace, security and refugee issues. The timeliness of the project and relevance of the materials produced provide a solid intersectional framework at the regional and national levels for stronger in-depth engagement on SDG implementation. The activities and outputs are consistent with the outcomes laid out in the project document (demonstrated engagement in public debate around the new sustainable development agenda and improvement of strategic partnerships with trade unions, academia and the private sector). Gender and disability mainstreaming were taken seriously and
- (ii) *The project was effective in achieving its planned objectives.* Challenges were easily overcome thanks to the efforts of both ANND's team and members to find constructive solution in reaching the planned objectives of the project activities. In each country, activities were implemented and were able to raise awareness and encourage further commitment from civil society and stakeholders in implementing the 2030 Agenda.
- (iii) *The project was efficient.* Resources were appropriately allocated, and good standards for accounting and accountability of partners were respected. The institutional arrangements with partners in the countries of implementation were strong and allowed for a well-managed and cost-effective activities. Target indicators were achieved and, in some cases, surpassed. The co-funding component of the project allowed for an optimization of resources and maximization of impact.
- (iv) *The project had a positive impact on both participants and stakeholders.* While actual policy reforms are difficult to link to specific projects and civil society influencing, it is clear that this project contributed to expanding the space for debates around sustainable development agendas in all the countries of implementation. Partner organizations were also empowered in organizing the country-specific activities to address specific national concerns and priorities, leading to enhanced debates within each context. More importantly, activities led to an increased interest from all stakeholders to commit to the 2030 Agenda, as several NGOs were able to integrate the latter to their programming.
- (v) *The project will carry a significant legacy in Arab civil society's engagement on the 2030 Agenda.* The socio-economic report and the guidebook (including pamphlets) can serve as an important foundation for any NGO or other stakeholder to engage on SDG implementation in the region. Their specific contextual analysis is accurate

and promotes a sustainable rights-based approach. ANND's members and participants in their activities continue to be connected through similar initiatives, some of which were directly developed as a result of the success of this project. By working at the national and regional levels, ANND and its members also diversify their advocacy tools towards governments and inscribe them in a long-term and consistent approach towards an appropriate development and policy reform agenda.

- (vi) *UNDEF's support had added-value.* Given the known and increasing mistrust in foreign funding in the Arab region, UNDEF's support was seen as neutral and credible. It also further strengthened the profile of the project with other national and regional offices of the UN and key consultants of the project, as UNDEF is based at the UN Headquarters and falls within Secretariat rules and regulations.

VI. Recommendations

- (i) *ANND should improve its strategic communication with partners and consultants.* While all participants appreciate the level of flexibility and partnership with ANND, one area for improvement can address the extent of ANND's strategic communication with all. Some participants and key consultants were unaware of the project's "big picture" in terms of all activities and components. One consultant said that the deliverable could have been improved had they known about the other components and general vision of the project. Another participant said that the networking can become more active if there were more opportunities to have the time to brainstorm on local initiatives that were not necessarily initiated by ANND but could be replicated.
- (ii) *Although there are significant achievements in terms of sustainability, some elements in this respect could be improved.* Project activities were successful but would have been more sustainable if local focal points had more resources to engage separately, for example in other geographic areas to maximize the visibility of the materials and support their work at the local level. Local focal points' increased ownership of the process at the national level would also support the role of ANND in monitoring the governments' plans in implementing the SDGs and potentially develop a reporting mechanism for civil society.
- (iii) *UNDEF could consider communicating with regional commissions such as ESCWA* on projects that touch on their scope of work. In addition to the national UNDP offices, regional commissions may offer specific context insights and may have resources to work on similar types of initiatives. This can help in reducing duplication risks and provide opportunities for different UN entities to enhance their collaboration.

VII. Lessons Learned

- **Regional projects that have the appropriate local partners for each activity and a strong coordination mechanism have higher chances of achieving their intended results.** ANND has had a strong modus operandi for more than a decade and their model has proven to be effective and impactful. However, carrying lessons learned from one project to the next, especially on a regional level, could be better prioritized during project implementation. For example, ANND could consider selecting more than one partner for a country as one national partner may be ideal for one activity but less so for the second activity in terms of their own outreach and dynamics of the activity itself.
- **Governments need to be better incentivized to appropriately engage on the 2030 Agenda.**

Feedback received from multiple participants from different countries indicated that governments see the VNR process mostly as a superficial exercise where their focus is on preparing a positive presentation about their work rather than undergoing a strategic thinking process. A stakeholder described the VNR process as an opportunity for governments to “show off” by showcasing a few sectoral policies, but missing the bigger picture, especially on human rights. NGOs selected to take part in national committees are not always the best placed or the most representative of civil society. This furthers the non-critical approach of VNRs. Since governments are not fully open to the process, civil society engagement remains limited. For example, if government representatives that are attending Agenda 2030-related events are not empowered to work on SDG implementation, NGOs attending those same events are weakened in their advocacy towards the former.
- **Monitoring the progress of SDG implementation in the Arab region would be more effective through the use of qualitative rather than quantitative indicators.**

Measuring implementation of SDGs through quantitative measures is not appropriate in the Arab region because of the lack of reliable and accurate data and access to information. As a result, the 2030 Agenda is seen as non-functional and not user-friendly and challenges to the practical meaning of SDG implementation remain considerable for NGOs addressing development and policy reform on the ground. Targets and indicators of SDGs are seen by many activists and analysts as counter-productive tools that are designed in silos and are incomplete. Since national statistics are highly unreliable and access to information is limited, the work on SDGs has been more successful when extremely localized, or when the focus is on qualitative policy reform. While the data and information gaps hinder the knowledge required to objectively measure the progress of countries in the implementation of the SDGs, ANND’s approach and strategy through this project and beyond is extremely constructive and useful.

VIII. Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation Questions and Detailed Findings

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ How well did the project relate to UNDEF's aims and objectives? ▪ To what extent were project stakeholders including beneficiaries involved in the formulation and design of the project? ▪ To what extent were decision makers (i.e. government and others) involved in the project and involved with formal levels of engagement? ▪ To what extent the intervention as designed enhanced public dialogue on policy reform around the SDGs and Agenda 2030? How did the project link national level and regional level engagement? Did the project reach beyond those that were already talking about development and policy reform issues? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the project? How appropriate were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What has the project achieved? How do the results contribute to each of the outcome areas of the objectives? ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ Did the project have an effective way to measure the outreach and impact achieved through the national dialogues, workshops and advocacy around recommendations? ▪ Were the guidebook and the 2030monitor website the adequate mediums to provide access to information around the topic to intended audiences and beyond? ▪ Did key stakeholders fully participate in the project? ▪ Did the right stakeholders benefit from the project; were there other important stakeholders not included? Is there any legacy or impact (e.g. capacity development or other) left with the partners? ▪ How effective were the trainings and capacity development activities? ▪ On delays and implementing partners (especially in Egypt): To what extent could this have been prevented and did the adjustments made yield the desired quality and impact?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? There seems to be incidences of

	project impacts?	<p>leveraging other resources or partners in joint activity during the project: how was that implemented?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives? To what extent was the delay in Egypt and 3-month extension consequential in the project's implementation? Did the co-financing of USD 67,425 add value to the project? How so? How were the three other donors involved in UNDEF-funded activities?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? Did the targeted beneficiaries experience tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? To what extent has the project cause changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples? What is the impact that the publication of the socio-economic report through five countries have in concrete terms? (output 2.1) Was it used throughout other aspects of the project? What concrete illustrations of impact can be found in relation with a contribution towards the stated overall development goal of contributing to "the improvement of the socio-economic situation in Arab countries through the enhancement of an inclusive social dialogue at the policymaking level." Is there evidence of a positive impact on the social dialogue around policymaking and policy reform?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent has the project established processes and outputs (especially the national dialogues, capacity development/training guidebook, and website) that are likely to support continued impact? To what extent were the capacity development activities delivered in a way that will ensure a sustained impact among the direct beneficiaries? Were the new skills consolidated during the project? Is there evidence that the skills are being practices beyond the scope of the project? Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)? Was the project set to leave a sustainable legacy beyond networks of organizations that are simply connected and informed? Was there something left behind in terms of setting up sustainable entry points for participation?
UNDEF value added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed

Background documents

- UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report*, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/>; (12 November 2018)
- ESCWA, *The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing challenges and looking beyond 2015*,
http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_EDGD_13_1_E.pdf (15 November 2018)

Project documentation

- Project document
- Reports: mid-term progress report, final narrative and financial reports
- Final financial report with break-down
- Milestone verification narrative and financial reports

Project outputs

- The regional socio-economic report:
<http://2030monitor.annd.org/data/report/english/23.pdf>
- The guidebook: <http://2030monitor.annd.org/data/manual/arabic/2.pdf>
- Other press releases and statements: <http://2030monitor.annd.org/>

Annex 3: Persons Interviewed

ANND staff	
Zahra Bazzi	Program Manager
Bihter Moschini	Project Coordinator
Aida Younis	Financial Manager
Project consultants and experts, partners and national facilitators	
Mervat Rishmawi	Human Rights Consultant, developed the guidebook
Mohammed Said Saadi	Produced the socio-economic report
Adib Nehme	Former UN-ESCWA
Ahmad Awad	Phoenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, Jordan
Anas Elhasnaoui	Regional Expert, Facilitator of national dialogue in Morocco
Abdelwahab Hafaiedeh	Applied Social Science Forum, Tunisia
Mona Azzat Hassan	New Women Foundation, Egypt
Other project participants/stakeholders	
Amneh Falah	Jordanian Women's Union
Jihen Chandoul	Observatoire Tunisien de l'Economie
Othman Makhoun	Morocco
Silvana Lakkis	Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union
Ola Sidani	Office of the President of the Council of Ministers, Lebanon
Omar Ghannam	Social Justice Platform, Egypt

Annex 4: Acronyms

AOHR	Arab Organization for Human Rights
ATUC	Arab Trade Union Confederation
CAWTAR	Arab Women Center for Training and Research
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ESCWA	UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
LAS	League of Arab States
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review