



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
 United Nations Development Group (UNDG)
 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)



League of Arab
 States

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

**Arab Consultative Meeting on an Accountability Framework
 for the Post-2015 Development Agenda
 Tunis, 15 -16 September 2014**

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

Introduction:

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and its partners, namely the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations Development Group, organized the Arab Consultative Meeting on an Accountability Framework for the Post 2015 Development Agenda in Tunis 15-16 September 2014.
2. The consultation was chaired by ESCWA and attended by around 85 participants representing Arab governments, regional organizations and partners, civil society, regional and international experts and academics, and other stakeholders. Participants from 13 Arab states attended the meeting, namely (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen). This included high-level officials from a range of ministries, including ministries of foreign affairs, international cooperation, environment, planning, economy, energy, water, agriculture, mining, finance, solidarity, women, family, social development and the Saudi Human Rights Commission.
3. United Nations participation included most members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the UNAIDS; the UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO);
4. In addition to the above UN system regional organizations, the meeting was attended by the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), UN-ECE, UN-ECA, the Regional Commissions New York Office. the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), and the UNDP/United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC)

5. Experts from international and regional organizations, including the Arab League Educational Cultural & Scientific Organization (ALECSO), the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Area (ICARDA), the Arab Towns Organization (ATO), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Arab Thought Forum, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting (GOIC), the International Trade Centre (Office for the Arab States), the Observatory of Corporate Social Responsibility (ORSE) in France, the Mediterranean Development Initiative (MDI), and AGFUND, participated in the meeting and enriched its deliberations. Major groups participation was also prominent and included representatives from the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED), Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN), Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), Environment Society of Oman (ESO), Research and Water Technologies Center (CERTE), Associative Network for Nature and Development in Tunisia (RANDET), The Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and Women Major Group (WMG).
6. The meeting provided a platform for discussion of a range of accountability issues across five substantive sessions: (1) Introduction and lessons learned from selected accountability mechanisms; (2) Review mechanisms related to means of implementation of sustainable development; (3) An Arab accountability mechanism anchored at the national level and feeding into the global level; (4) Towards a sustainability performance review for the Arab countries; and (5) Reporting on sustainable development by development actors, including enterprises. A final high level session on the accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda concluded the meeting. Participants agreed that there is a need to further clarify the regional accountability framework within the post 2015 development agenda and the need for a series of regional consultations on this issue. In addition, the participants agreed that a Chair's Summary be brought to the attention of the United Nations Secretary General's to inform the synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda.
7. The following summary provides an overview of the key messages, lessons learned and conclusions and recommendations drawn from the various sessions.

Accountability and the Post-2015 Agenda: Concepts, Approaches and the Arab Regional Framing

8. Initial discussions during the consultative dialogue explored the need for an effective accountability and follow-up mechanism as part of the emerging framework for the post-2015 agenda, complemented by a transformative vision, global goals, partnerships and means of implementation. The requirement that this accountability framework be relevant and appropriately adapted to the regional context was highlighted.
9. The post-2015 development agenda needs to be centred on human rights and address aspects such as participation, inequality and social justice that were not adequately addressed in the MDGs. In this regard, governments will have primary responsibility for implementation of the new agenda, but all development actors including civil society, international organisations and the private sector should also be held accountable for their actions.
10. Accountability was considered one of the shortcomings in the MDG framework which has had a detrimental impact with regard to fulfilling development commitments. The absence or weakness of accountability leads to wasted resources, spread of corruption, consistent failure to deliver on development goals, greater inequality and social injustice, greater citizen dissatisfaction and grounds for political uprisings, conflict and instability. Increasingly well-

informed and aware citizens will be a key driver for an effective accountability mechanism in the post-2015 development framework.

11. There was broad consensus that an effective multi-layered mechanism for monitoring, accountability and follow-up is needed as part of the post-2015 development agenda. Such a mechanism could ultimately take many forms, panellists and participants raised and explored several initial questions: Who should hold whom accountable for what, and through which mechanisms? Who are the key stakeholders? What lessons can be learned from past experiences internationally and within the region that we can draw upon while developing an accountability framework and review mechanisms for post 2015 agenda?

12. The need for a clear definition of accountability was considered important as well as the identification of principles to serve as a minimum for consensus. Accountability is essentially a process of holding different stakeholders responsible for their actions. In the post-2015 development context, it should hold all stakeholders responsible for effectively and efficiently achieving development outcomes and delivering on commitments. It should be seen as a moral obligation to citizens.

13. Participants identified several key principles for accountability such as transparency, flexibility, responsibility, simplicity, inclusiveness and answerability. It should have a rights-based approach that focuses on results and outcomes, effectiveness and efficiency, and the use of incentives to drive behaviour change. It should be pursued as a component of a social contract between the State and its citizens based on national responsibility for achieving sustainable development. It should not be limited to evaluation and review. Even though democracy is widely understood to be an important element for accountability, and acknowledged as such by participants, discussions on this issue was largely underplayed by the meeting participants.

14. The key building blocks of accountability include measuring progress (data/evidence), sharing and disseminating information (information and communication); and engaging in a process of negotiation for change or reform (advocacy and influencing). Accountability requires an effective enabling environment comprising political will, attitudes and capacities of stakeholders, democratic values and practices, and the rule of law.

15. Accountability mechanisms can be voluntary or obligatory (and positive or negative) in the way in which they incentivise behaviour change. When designing a mechanism, it should be viewed within the broader context as a tool for improving implementation and overall quality of development efforts. Voluntary mechanisms can provide a more positive means for incentivising behaviour but are not legally binding and can therefore be difficult to enforce.

16. The necessary capacities needed for accountability and associated costs are also very important. Accountability requires considerable national capacity in terms of data management and monitoring as well as human and financial resources. As such, different countries will have varied capabilities in terms of establishing and delivering an effective mechanism. The framework should therefore also include means to address capacity gaps and corrective measures to support progress where needed, and should not be based on a punitive approach that prejudices states.

17. Arab countries and the Arab region are not starting from scratch, but need to build on successful experiences in reviewing progress with the MDGs and in areas such as trade, human rights, investment and environmental management. Constructive dialogue and experience sharing can help to build a common understanding of accountability and its mechanisms. Regional MDGs reporting experience remains the most solid tool for reviewing and monitoring progress and thus should be thoroughly studied to draw lessons learned. As a

first step, it is important to engage all key stakeholders in such a dialogue in order to strengthen the sense of ownership and ensure sustainability of the process.

18. For any accountability mechanism to work, the Arab regional development context needs to be taken into account as the region currently faces many challenges and impediments to development, such as conflict, occupation, political transition and deficits in social justice.

19. The regional scale provides a useful entry point for accountability given that countries within a region often share similar challenges. A regional institutional framework would support countries' efforts to deliver on development commitments. This regional accountability framework is likely to lessen the burden of global-level requirements and can enhance coordination among regional organisations and actors to strengthen the link between global commitments and national efforts.

Lessons learned from selected accountability, review and reporting mechanisms

20. Expert presenters and participants explored national, regional and international experience with a diverse range of existing accountability and review mechanisms, such as the Annual Ministerial Review, the Universal Periodic Review, the African Peer Review Mechanism, mutual accountability, trade policy reviews and sustainability impact assessments, environmental performance reviews, investment policy reviews and citizen-driven accountability. Several reporting mechanisms were also considered, including corporate social responsibility along with emerging global and regional sustainable development reporting.

21. There have been many positive experiences with these accountability and review mechanisms that can provide useful lessons for the post-2015 framework. For example, accountability mechanisms should be guided by national leadership, build data and monitoring capacity, remain voluntary, enable comparability of data across countries through a consistent framework, be multi-layered (national, regional, global) with different tasks assigned to different levels, and include feedback and learning. Active engagement of civil society is necessary, as well as improving transparency and access to information and data.

22. In particular, the African Peer Review mechanism was highlighted as the most comprehensive peer review mechanism globally, with ambitious objectives and a comprehensive approach. It could provide a useful model for a regional accountability mechanism based on peer review that could be adapted for use in other regions. Experience with this mechanism has highlighted the need to engage research institutions, identify focal points and experts, enhance capacity for data collection and disaggregation, and limit the scope of the review to ensure that it is manageable and achievable. The regional level provides a useful scale for experience and knowledge sharing.

23. Experiences with the Universal Periodic Review can inspire the development of an accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda. They include good practice in terms of engaging civil society in decision-making processes, including national budgets and development plans. Experiences with the UPR also highlight the importance of access to information and use of disaggregated data to measure progress, and the value of strengthening coordination and cooperation with human rights mechanisms of the United Nations to report on progress made in economic and social rights.

24. International experience with mutual accountability as part of the aid effectiveness agenda has now moved to the concept of “inclusive accountability” which considers a broader range of stakeholders beyond government and donors as playing a role in accountability at the national level. This requires good governance, dedicated institutional frameworks for policy evaluation and assessment of progress, and inclusive participatory processes engaging government, civil society, parliamentarians, private sector, academics, local authorities and other actors.

25. Different review mechanisms relating to trade, investment and environment can also provide an important technical and capacity building function, helping to identify areas where institutional settings could be enhanced, and where technical assistance is required to help deliver development objectives. They also provide a mechanism for evidence-based policy and planning, integrated management, promoting information exchange, greater accountability at the national level, and strengthening international cooperation.

26. The role of monitoring and reporting on progress in the context of the SDGs and post-2015 agenda was highlighted. To ensure follow-up and accountability, the SDGs, their targets and indicators would need to be mainstreamed into national development plans and strategies. This is a complex task that will require technical support and capacity building for developing countries. Data availability and management systems, frameworks for multi-stakeholder participation and institutional arrangements for vertical and horizontal coordination will be critical. National monitoring can feed into regional and global monitoring and reporting processes, which would require consistency and comparability of indicators and data.

27. A key message from the discussions was that accountability should involve all stakeholders, with national governments having primary responsibility and legitimacy. The most important mechanism for accountability at the national level is the institutional framework comprising the legislature, judiciary and executive. This institutional framework should ensure transparency, access to and disclosure of information and hold governments and other stakeholders accountable for their policies and actions. Strengthening governance at the national level in the Arab region will be necessary for improving accountability. Parliamentarians as elected representatives are critical stakeholders in the accountability framework, particularly with regard to oversight of government policy and expenditure.

28. Participants recommended that any accountability mechanism should be linked to improving implementation of an effective development framework. It should provide a reliable mechanism at the national level for monitoring and reporting and be supported by technical and institutional capacity building for developing countries. It should ensure accountability of the developed world in supporting developing countries to implement the post-2015 agenda.

Options for an Arab Regional Accountability Mechanism for the Post-2015 Agenda that is Anchored at the National Level

29. Potential options for a regional accountability mechanism in the context of the post-2015 development agenda were discussed by participations, based on an expert proposal outlined in the main background document and presented during the meeting.

30. Accountability in the context of sustainable development refers to the responsibility of institutions to deliver development outcomes to meet commitments made. National accountability mechanisms form the foundation for governance and the basis for regional and global platforms. National accountability must be inclusive, involving governments, parliamentarians, civil society, private enterprises, the media, private sector, experts and other stakeholders. All of these stakeholders must be accountable for their actions and together

represent an “accountability network”. Parliament is the core institution with oversight authority because it represents citizens through their elected representatives.

31. With the adoption of the SDGs, due attention will need be paid to strengthening the capacities of institutions responsible for gathering and analyzing relevant information on sustainable development, including the setting up of an accounting system to record progress in achieving development goals and disaggregating data by gender, regions and other criteria to assist in analyzing results. Strengthening the independence and freedom of civil society organizations will also support monitoring and implementation of policy outcomes. As a major contributor to a country’s growth and development, the private sector must also be held accountable and abide by voluntary international rules and regulations for corporate social responsibility.

32. Any regional accountability mechanism for sustainable development should build upon lessons learned from national, regional and global experience with such mechanisms. As outlined in the background paper and discussed in the meeting, these include the need to: (a) review existing sustainable development strategies and adjusting them as required; (b) devote more attention and resources to strengthening institutional capacities which in many cases are below the level of competence and skill/knowledge required for their effective functioning; (c) improve those legal and regulatory regimes which suffer from complexity and incoherence; and (d) tighten rules fighting corruptive practices.

33. The proposal for a regional mechanism that was considered during the meeting was based on a two-phased approach which would enable the mechanism to be gradually put in place over the course of several years in consultation with stakeholders. The first phase lasting four to five years would involve: gaining regional consensus on the role and functions for a regional mechanism; reviewing existing national sustainable development strategies and sustainability performance; providing assistance to strengthen national accountability structures and sharing of experiences, good practices and success stories (including through a pilot peer review of a limited number of countries); upgrading technical capacities of monitoring, evaluation and oversight institutions; and commencing the development of a regional sustainability index.

34. Phase 2 would build upon these initial efforts to establish a focused, simple and selective accountability platform for engaging political leadership and reviewing progress in achieving strategic goals. The annual Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD), which will be organized by ESCWA and its partners, as a regional equivalent of the global High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), provides an ideal venue for this purpose. However, it would need to be effectively linked to the existing regional institutional architecture including LAS and ESCWA. The platform could be supported by ongoing reviews (including peer reviews), monitoring and publication of regional progress on sustainable development and sustainability index rankings, the development of a regional accounting system and national observatories, provision of development assistance from international organizations and donors, and links to the global HLPF and other review meetings.

35. Participants discussed this proposal, highlighting that regional accountability should be based on a foundation of national accountability where there is a clear separation of powers and oversight role for all key national stakeholders. Experience with the MDGs has taught us that the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs will only be implemented if they are mainstreamed into national plans. An important step at the national level will therefore be the revision of these plans and establishing effective institutions for implementation, monitoring and follow-up. Regional and international assistance will be necessary to build national capacities and enable countries to do this.

36. The need to ensure that any mechanism is realistic was highlighted. Ideally, the architecture of an accountability mechanism should be multi-level, cemented at the national level and feed into the regional and global levels. However, it is difficult to conceive of such architecture while occupation, conflict, terrorism and refugee crises continue to be serious impediments to development in the Arab region.

37. Further, establishing such an accountability framework would be an expensive process and resources must be made available to support developing countries and stakeholders. Participants emphasized the need for an accountable UN system, effective regional institutions and strong programs for national institutions building for sustainable development and accountability.

38. Multiple regional stakeholders must be engaged in the accountability framework. Member states are the prime actors, while ESCWA and other UN organisations and agencies can facilitate regional coordination, monitoring, support, capacity building and experience sharing. Participants stressed the important role that LAS could play in any regional accountability mechanism. In particular, the Economic, Developmental and Social Summit would play an important role as an institution for monitoring progress and follow-up and political consensus. However, efforts would need to be made to upgrade the mandate and improve the capacity of LAS to perform this function.

Key Messages

39. The participants stressed that occupation and terrorism are serious impediments to development in the Arab region.

40. There was broad consensus that an effective multi-layered mechanism for monitoring, accountability and follow-up is needed as part of the post-2015 development agenda. Such a mechanism could ultimately take many forms, panellists and participants raised and explored several initial questions: Who should hold whom accountable for what, and through which mechanisms? Who are the key stakeholders? What lessons can be learned from past experiences internationally and within the region with accountability and review mechanisms?

41. The necessary capacities needed for accountability and associated costs are important elements to consider while designing the accountability framework. Further, establishing such an accountability framework would be an expensive process and resources must be made available to support developing countries and stakeholders. Participants emphasized the need for an accountable UN system, effective regional institutions and strong programs for national institutions building for sustainable development and accountability.

42. Arab countries and the Arab region are not starting from scratch, but need to build on successful experiences in reviewing progress with the MDGs and in areas such as trade, human rights, investment and environmental management. Constructive dialogue and experience sharing can help to build a common understanding of accountability and its mechanisms. As a first step, it is important to engage all key stakeholders in such a dialogue in order to strengthen the sense of ownership and ensure sustainability of the process.

43. Discussions on accountability have only begun and it will take some time to reach agreement and consensus. These discussions will need to continue within the context of the emerging sustainable development agenda, as well as other key international negotiations and frameworks including climate change. Economic integration, human rights and democracy should be at the core of a transformative accountability framework for development and peace beyond 2015.

44. An effective mechanism would be multi-layered, comprising global, regional and national components. National leadership is critical; however countries face many challenges, including limited national institutional capacities and resources for designing policies, gathering and analysing information and data and for follow-up.

45. Member Countries are sceptical about the effectiveness of the national mechanisms beyond reporting to also include corrective measures, and regarding the ability of the global community to discuss issues of occupation, double standards and terrorism.

46. An accountability framework at the regional level should build on the existing institutional architecture, with an important role for the League of Arab States (LAS) through its Economic, Developmental and Social Summits. ESCWA, UN agencies and programs, civil society, the private sector, and LAS need to join their efforts to ensure a solid accountability framework for the post-2015 agenda. The regional level provides a useful scale for experience and knowledge sharing. The region need to learn from other experiences, and design carefully and effectively its tools and not merely replicate the existing tools.

47. Accountability at the global level relies on developing countries committing to achieving the SDGs and to reporting on the progress made and challenges faced; and on developed countries and the global community at large committing to ensuring support to developing countries both in implementation and monitoring.

48. ESCWA was identified as a platform that can facilitate regional reporting on SDGs progress, information sharing, dissemination of best practices, and capacity building.

49. The region welcomed the development of the annual Arab Forum for Sustainable Development to mirror the HLPF and the prototype of the Arab Sustainable Development Report as recent regional initiatives that can support any accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda. These ESCWA initiatives are supported by LAS and other partners including the RCM members.