

## JORDAN

# Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

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Jordan articulated its first National MDG report in 2004 impacting significantly on policy-making processes, as the goals, targets and indicators were adapted and aligned with national plans and development priorities. In 2006, two more documents, the “National Agenda” and “We are all Jordan” articulated a national vision, which was operationalized into a three year National Executive Programme (NEP), integrating MDG indicators related to social welfare, health care, poverty and education and outlining policies, programs and projects for government institutions.

Despite some progress in achieving the MDGs, little progress was made on goals that required structural change, harmony among policies, continuity and sustainability of funding—notably the goals of full employment and environmental sustainability.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving basic education and gender equality, improving child and maternal health, and ensuring environmental sustainability are still the main challenges, particularly following the global economic crisis and ongoing refugee crisis.

In 2015, “Jordan 2025. A national vision and strategy” was released, through which previous policies, strategies and recommendations were reviewed and a broader process of engagement was set. The strategy includes several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the eradication of poverty, the improvement of the educational system, the provision of clear water and sanitation, the guarantee of decent work and economic growth and the development of the sustainable

communities and cities, but still a lot needs to be done in order for this approach to be effective and enable Jordan’s development to be inclusive and sustainable.

At the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030. The SDGs are basically built on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000, but take off from those in important ways. Seven of the MDGs focused on issues such as poverty and hunger, education, communicable diseases, maternal and child mortality, gender inequality, and environmental degradation, intended solely for developing countries, while the 8th goal—A Global Partnership for Development was intended to track rich country support. The new Global Goals, and the broader sustainability agenda, go much further than the MDGs, designed to apply to rich countries as well as developing countries, addressing the root causes of poverty, inequalities and unsustainable production and consumption as well as the obstacles to achieving development that works for all people.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a small, resource-starved, middle-income country with insufficient sources of water, oil, and other natural resources and a growing population, released its first National MDG report in 2004, which had an important impact on policy-making as the goals, targets and indicators were adapted and aligned with national plans and development priorities. In 2006 two more documents articulated the vision of the country and development planning, namely the “National Agenda” and “We are all Jordan”. Subsequently, this vision was

<sup>1</sup> See: [http://www.mwi.gov.jo/sites/en-us/Hot%20Issues/SDG\\_Jordan%20Precspective\\_Post%202015.pdf](http://www.mwi.gov.jo/sites/en-us/Hot%20Issues/SDG_Jordan%20Precspective_Post%202015.pdf)

operationalized into a three year National Executive Programme (NEP), specifying policies, programs and projects for government institutions. MDG indicators had been integrated within those plans, related to social welfare, health care, poverty reduction and education.

Efforts to implement the MDGs were made by the Government as well as by civil society groups, but the level of achievement has been modest for goals that required structural change, harmony among policies, continuity and sustainability of funding—notably the goals of full employment and environmental sustainability.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving basic education and gender equality, improving child and maternal health, and ensuring environmental sustainability are still the main challenges, particularly following the global economic crisis and ongoing refugee crisis.

In 2015, a new planning document, “Jordan 2025. A national vision and strategy”, has been designed, through which previous policies, strategies and recommendations were reviewed and a broader process of engagement was set. The strategy includes several Sustainable Development Goals, such as the eradication of poverty, the improvement of the educational structure and system, the provision of clear water and sanitation, the guarantee of decent work and economic growth and the development of the sustainable communities and cities, but still a lot needs to be done in order for this approach to be truly effective and enable Jordan’s development to be inclusive and sustainable, especially considering that there have been few consultations to enable civil society organizations (CSOs), political parties and business associations to contribute to the process.

In fact, to date the Government has not taken any concrete step towards the promotion and realization of Sustainable Development Goals, and no specific unit, institution or ministry has been assigned to take charge of this process, indicating both a lack of institutional capacity as well as a lack of political will.

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<sup>2</sup> See: [http://www.mwi.gov.jo/sites/en-us/Hot%20Issues/SDG\\_Jordan%20Perspective\\_Post%202015.pdf](http://www.mwi.gov.jo/sites/en-us/Hot%20Issues/SDG_Jordan%20Perspective_Post%202015.pdf)

As for civil society organizations, although they seem to be the only ones interested in the achievement of the SDGs, they continue to suffer from a lack of capacity. While in 2013 they moved up from “Impeded” to “Evolving” on the 2016 USAID NGO Sustainability Index in terms of legal environment, service provision and public image, they remained “Impeded” in terms of organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy and infrastructure. This resulted in an overall score of 5 on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is the most enhanced and 7 is the most impeded.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the only SDG initiative carried out during the last few years has been the “Civil Coalition for Sustainable Development Goals”, a national coalition of about 70 of the more active CSOs. These are in the process of drafting their internal documents and over the next three months they will work on action plans and strategies to achieve the SDGs.

### Structural obstacles to implementing the 2030 Agenda

Part of the reason for the lack of progress in promoting the SDGs is the fact that the country faces some serious structural obstacles. For one thing, it depends overwhelmingly on external financing; indeed, the amount of foreign assistance Jordan relies on is increasing steadily, to the point that foreign grants and loans cover one third of the public expenditure, indicating the scale of the problem. The total public debt (domestic and external) of the GDP has been skyrocketing during the last five years, reaching the amount of 23,344 million JOD or 86.6% in 2015 GDP<sup>4</sup>. According to recent data provided by financial governmental sources, the amount of public debt seems to have reached 25,063.6 million JOD, i.e. 93% of the GDP.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, the public budget is featured by an high percentage of deficit, reaching 6.8% of the GDP

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<sup>3</sup> See

[https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/2013MENA\\_CSOSI%20Final.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/2013MENA_CSOSI%20Final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Monthly financial report, Jordanian Ministry of Finance, March 2016.

Available at: <http://www.mof.gov.jo/en-us/mainpage.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Finance, monthly financial report, April, 2016.

excluding grants<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, turmoil and unrest in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iraq and the progressive Israeli occupation of Palestine present a geographic continuum of instability, which is unsettling citizens and Government both, making it hard for public and political institutions to address local needs.

The ongoing Syrian conflict has forced Jordan (along with Turkey and Lebanon) to bear a huge share of the global responsibility for receiving Syrian refugees. The country hosts more than 1.3 million Syrians, of whom 630,000 are registered refugees<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, the Syrian refugees' community has been reported to constitute fully 20 percent of the population living in Jordan. The strains have grown more severe over the last five years, as the influx of Syrians fleeing their country has grown exponentially, imposing severe stress on Jordan's economy, host communities, fiscal position and public services. The international community has helped; but matching resources with needs is increasingly difficult.

As a result, Jordan is facing an increasing strain on natural resources and infrastructure, which is not helped by the high fertility rate. Population fertility has more than doubled since 1980, and the growth rate is still among the highest in the world (reported as 3.86% in 2014<sup>8</sup>). Already one of the world's most water-starved countries, Jordan faces increasing deterioration in the quality and quantity of its water resources, mainly due to an unprecedented demand for water services (as a consequence of population growth as well as an increasing number of refugees) along with over-consumption and mismanagement; finally, the country is facing severe land degradation – a result of inadequate land-use planning, urban encroachment, soil erosion and poor waste disposal methods.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to these obstacles, the main challenge Jordan

has to deal with is a lack of good governance. The Government needs to undertake political reforms to promote greater democratic accountability and transparency, to encourage political pluralism and strengthen civil society, including through greater freedom of expression as well as opportunities for civil society consultations. Indeed, political participation, freedom of the press, the status of women, and the role of civil society still constitute outstanding challenges.

For one thing access to information is very limited. Articles 15 and 17 of the Constitution provide the foundation of individuals' right to information, operationalized through the Law on Guarantee of Access to Information No. 47 in 2007. This states that "Every Jordanian has to right to obtain the information he/she requires in accordance with the provisions of this Law, if he/she has a lawful interest or a legitimate reason therefor". Article 8 obligates officials to facilitate access to information and guarantee its disclosure without delay and in the manner stipulated in the present Law". Since its adoption however, no special measures or policies have been implemented to raise public awareness of this right. Nor have various department officials been made aware of, and trained in the right to access information or the procedures to be followed in submitting information to citizens.<sup>10</sup> The main groups trying to change this are writers and journalists, who continually demand that the Government enforce the right to access information and provide needed information. However, the Jordanian Press Association reported that press freedom was tightened in 2013, as the Government blocked several dozen websites following the 2012 amendment to the Press and Publication Law that requires these to be registered with the authorities.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, lack of institutional capacity has created a situation where the Government, Parliament and the bureaucratic system itself are not able to adhere to

6 Ministry of Finance, monthly financial report, April, 2016.

7 "A World at War: Global Trends for 2014", UNHCR, 2015, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.pdf>

8 See: [http://www.indexmundi.com/jordan/population\\_growth\\_rate.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/jordan/population_growth_rate.html)

9 See: [http://www.mwi.gov.jo/sites/en-us/Hot%20Issues/SDG\\_Jordan%20Precspective\\_Post%202015.pdf](http://www.mwi.gov.jo/sites/en-us/Hot%20Issues/SDG_Jordan%20Precspective_Post%202015.pdf)

10 See:

[http://www.nchr.org.jo/english/ModulesFiles/PublicationsFiles/Files/Information-Eng1%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.nchr.org.jo/english/ModulesFiles/PublicationsFiles/Files/Information-Eng1%20(2).pdf)

11 See <https://www.cpj.org/2013/06/authorities-block-hundreds-of-websites-in-jordan.php>

institutional standards, failing to provide adequate, efficient and appropriate services, nor are they able to contribute to greater economic productivity. This has resulted in a lack of institutional involvement in the realization of SDGs on the national and local levels, generating a lack of trust and confidence in government entities. Additionally, it should be noticed that there is a lack of citizens' participation in the political life of the country, mainly due to the fact that although CSOs continue to play a critical role in meeting development needs at the national level by implementing projects in health, environment, agriculture, economic support, rural development, capacity building, youth activities, and good governance, they are still facing numerous challenges, including legal restrictions that greatly limit their ability to engage in advocacy and lobbying, weak internal management structures, and heavy dependence on foreign donors.

Moreover, despite efforts at reform, it appears that maintaining the status quo with key regional and foreign allies has proved a greater priority—not only for the Government but also its allies. Jordan has taken several steps backwards in recent years, reducing the powers of Parliament which are already very limited. According to the constitution, the King can appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the upper house of Parliament.<sup>12</sup> In the last five years, the Constitution has been amended three times: in 2011, 2014 and 2016; although some progress towards democracy has been made at the beginning, more recent amendments increased the power of the King; this in addition to the fact that powers have been concentrated more and more into the hands of few people with the right connections, exercising therefore much more control over the society and its decision making processes, and consequently limiting citizens' rights to improve their quality of life and to enjoy all their basic human rights in a democratic state. Indeed, although Jordan is considered to be an open and democratic country, legal experts have stated that these changes are bringing the country into a system

of absolute monarchy.<sup>13</sup>

In these terms, the “double discourse” carried out in the country seems to be pretty clear: the official position reiterates the necessity of design and implementation of policy reforms, and the willingness of commitment towards a democratic path, but then few actual and effective changes are carried out on the ground. These policies indeed reflect the Government's way of thinking on the participation of Jordanian people as well as CSOs in the political and social life of the country, that is, nothing has changed after decades of monopoly held on policy-making and the decision-making process. This reality impacts negatively on several levels of the process of democratization in Jordan, especially in terms of human rights. Indeed, it has to be observed that this approach is enabling the Government to gain more and more power on policy development and decision-making processes, preventing especially CSOs from participating to national management and policies design. This is also clear if we observe that, although two progressive laws have been enforced, namely the Political Parties Law and the General Election Law, freedom of association and of assembly, especially for societies and trade unions are severely limited.<sup>14</sup>

### Involvement of the private sector

As mentioned, it seems that only civil society groups are interested in achieving the SDGs. The private sector is neither aware of these goals nor involved in their implementation so its contribution is not as significant as it should be. Corporate Social Responsibility policies set out by some private companies constitute an important step of course, but it has to be said that the only existing cooperation programs are carried out between corporate/private institutions and government

<sup>12</sup> See: [http://www.foundationforfuture.org/en/Portals/0/Publications/Assessing\\_Democracy\\_Assistance\\_Jordan.pdf](http://www.foundationforfuture.org/en/Portals/0/Publications/Assessing_Democracy_Assistance_Jordan.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Sufian Obaidat, Jordan's 2016 constitutional amendments: A return to absolute monarchy?, Content from ConstitutionNet.org. Find the full article here: <http://www.constitutionnet.org/ar/news/jordans-2016-constitutional-amendments-return-absolute-monarchy>.

<sup>14</sup> “Labor Protests in Jordan – 2015” prepared by Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), March 2016.

NGOs (GNGOs) and semi-governmental NGOs. Therefore, very few NGOs actually benefit from private sector engagement.

Currently, no effective policy approaches have been designed and no results-oriented efforts have been made to address the challenges—including any long term strategies to improve the situation of refugees. Indeed, the few initiatives and responses remain weak and ineffective; also, a crucial aspect is the fact that there is lack of communication and collaboration among institutions and organizations, that usually tend to work individually.

### Recommendations

To make the process of implementing the SDGs a meaningful one, the Government should create a specialized unit in order to implement a specific strategy to achieve the 17 SDGs. Beyond this, action is needed by Government, civil society and international partners to:

- Increase public and civil society awareness of the 2030 Agenda, including understanding the nature and potential of the SDGs and how organizations and individuals must adapt to address sustainable development;
- Engage the participation of stakeholders at the national level;
- Encourage greater private sector involvement in realizing the SDGs; the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises can provide a strong existing framework for corporate accountability supporting the aims of the SDGs;
- Promote and contribute to broad issue-based coalitions and partnerships to coordinate the actions and expertise of CSOs and institutions to match the ambition of Agenda 2030;
- National governments and international partners should acknowledge and define the role of local governments and local stakeholders in setting, implementing and monitoring the Post- 2015 Development Agenda to ensure further accountability and transparency;
- Strengthen the capacities of national, regional and international associations of local governments to participate in global dialogues, disseminate information and give policy advice and support;
- Promote transparency and wider access to data and information to local government authorities and communities through ICT, online social networks and community media.