

# MDGs in the Arab region: a tool and a challenge

The Arab countries face their own set of challenges in the Millennium Development Goals campaign. National MDG Reports highlight the lack of poverty data in many countries in the region while deep-rooted prejudices towards women will require drastic changes in order to achieve gender equity. Civil society organizations must play an active role in the MDG campaign, in particular regarding policy formulation and strategic planning.

## Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

Ziad Abdel Samad / Kinda Mohamadieh

### Introduction

All Arab countries signed the Millennium Declaration and committed themselves to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. They also participated in the preparation of national MDG reports (MDGRs), publishing 18 reports by May 2005.

The Arab region faces many specific challenges regarding the achievement of the MDGs. Often development policies are not a priority for Arab states since they are overshadowed by the complex political dynamics of the region. Arab countries have been involved with national liberation agendas and regional anti-neocolonial policies for a long time, while marginalizing the need for national development agendas based on local needs and priorities. Arab leaders and decision-makers have not considered that strengthening democratic processes and sustainable development policies at a local level might enhance and support sovereignty at regional and international levels. The Arab region has great resources which are meant to fuel development. However regional and national conflicts have rendered these resources useless. In this context, and as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the occupation of Iraq continues, most Arab states are stagnating or deteriorating, with a controlled and weak civil society, low human development, and declining socioeconomic trends.

Ten years after the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Arab region are still demanding what they were after at the close of the Summit. In a declaration issued in Copenhagen by Arab CSOs participating in the Summit, these organizations stressed that decision-making processes and declarations made during the Summit lacked the participation of both civil society and official country representatives. They refused to consider that the participation of CSOs in the Summit meant that they agreed and supported its results. They also believed that the Summit opposed their set objectives and did not address the real reasons and responsibilities behind poverty, marginalization, and other social ills,<sup>1</sup> for which reasons their declaration called for:<sup>2</sup>

- consideration of national social problems within a global context
- examination of the causes of development problems such as the impact of structural adjustment policies, financial policies, and the global trading system
- recognition of debt cancellation as a right of developing countries
- a redefinition of the concept of free trade and open markets
- consideration of employment needs and workers' freedom of movement
- recognition of environmental problems as a North-South issue, since developing countries are becoming a dump for developed countries' waste
- prioritization of democracy, women's rights, and culture as major components in the development process
- urgent reform of the United Nations and its agencies.

This report looks at examples of activities achieved to date in the MDG campaign in the Arab region, including the MDGRs. It concentrates on poverty and gender indicator reporting, in light of the Copenhagen Summit and the Beijing Conference in 1995, and discusses how MDG 8 is addressed in the Arab MDGRs. In addition, the report considers the roles of various actors, including government, multilateral organizations, CSOs, and UN agencies.

### MDG action to date

In general, mobilization for the MDG campaign in the Arab region started late. Until 2004, all MDG efforts had focused on the MDGRs. This left only one year to undertake other activities before progress was evaluated at the United Nations General Assembly Special Summit on the Millennium Development Goals in September 2005. The following factors were identified as essential for a successful MDG process:

- localizing the indicators and integrating targets within national policies
- establishing and enhancing networking and coordination between governmental institutions, UN agencies, and CSOs
- monitoring progress and enhancing the capacity for data collection and processing.

In this context different activities and projects have been organized in order to raise awareness and mobilize to meet the MDGs. These activities include workshops by UN agencies, CSOs, and governmental institutions, as well as reporting, awareness-raising campaigns, pilot projects, and coalition-building initiatives.

Often the national and regional MDG workshops included participants from the Government, Parliament, civil society, press, academia, research institutes, and UN agencies. Their agendas included the launch and evaluation of MDGRs, analysis of costing processes and methodologies, and discussion of MDG challenges and opportunities in the Arab region.

In Lebanon, a roll-out agenda was developed based on an MDGR prepared with the help of civil society. In addition, a series of consultations between the Government, CSOs, and UN agencies were organized which included a session with Parliament where a draft poverty strategy was elaborated. In Morocco, a pilot project to *engender* the MDGs was launched to promote equality in education for women and girls.

A pilot project called the Jemstone Network was started in Jordan by a non-governmental organization (NGO) to raise awareness on the MDGs. It aims to recruit and train a small team of development volunteers who will visit communities and explain how the MDGs apply to daily life. In Tunisia, the UN in coordination with the private sector and some CSOs used a creative approach to raising awareness with the Millennium Caravan.<sup>3</sup>

Other initiatives include MDG coalitions of CSOs at the sub-national level in Egypt. In Djibouti, a pilot project is also being conducted by the UN Country Team in a primary school to address MDG 2 (Achieve universal primary education), MDG 3 (Promote gender equality and empower women), as well as hygiene and sanitation issues.

Several activities have been directed towards engaging parliamentarians in the MDG process. A project document entitled *UNDP Support to the Parliament - Phase II*, was produced in Morocco with the aim of enhancing the capacity and substantive knowledge of parliamentarians and MDG committees so that they can effectively participate in the legislative process, better exercise oversight, and increase citizens' input in the democratic process. In Mauritania, the UNDP country office has

1 Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND). "Social Development, Geneva 2000. Social Development in the Arab World." Presented to the *Irregular Session of the United Nations*, 26-30 June 2000 in Geneva.

2 *Ibid*, p. 37-40

3 An artistic caravan toured the Northern and central parts of the country with the Tunisian National School of Circus to convey the importance of achieving the MDGs.

engaged members of Parliament in a process of mainstreaming the formulation of public policies to address poverty issues and MDGs.

Several activities were directed towards young people in order to incorporate their issues into the MDG campaign. These included activities at universities such as lectures and workshops around the MDGs and mobilization mechanisms.

These MDG-related activities are a sample of the projects undertaken in the Arab region. Most of the efforts are still limited to pilot projects and have not been implemented on a larger scale. Also, there has been no follow-up to the activities implemented and a lack of coordination among campaign efforts. Accordingly, projects have remained isolated from national policies and programmes. Efforts have focused mainly on raising awareness, while stakeholders have not yet begun the action-oriented stage of the campaign where measurable projects might lead to real change.

Projects should be adopted on a larger scale, endorsed by governments, and integrated into national policies. To date the MDGRs have not been used as tools for policy and strategy elaboration, or as a means of evaluation, or to set benchmarks, or plan for the future. Even when MDGRs were prepared using a participatory approach, as was the case in Lebanon, they were not developed into national comprehensive work plans. In Lebanon during consultation sessions with parliamentarians - the very people who are supposed to lead national policy-making on the MDGs - only three of the 128 members of Parliament participated.

### National MDGRs

MDGRs were produced in eighteen Arab countries: the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Saudi Arabia in 2002; Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Yemen, Comoros, and Syria in 2003; Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia in 2004; Oman in 2005; Egypt first in 2002 and then in 2005,<sup>4</sup> and Somalia's draft report in 2004.

Although a significant number of countries have produced reports, most were prepared exclusively by government bodies in collaboration with UN agencies, and there was little or no civil society participation. CSOs in Lebanon participated in the preparation of the country MDGR, but other countries failed to include this sector in the process. Consequently, the reports are overly optimistic about progress made to date and the MDG indicators. They are also weak tools for measuring MDG progress and planning future activities to achieve the goals.

4 Data was collected from the Regional Bureau for Arab States and from other UN agencies.

### MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Poverty is a central issue in the development process and affects every other MDG. Although extreme poverty is specifically targeted in the MDGs, the Arab MDGRs only outlined it. However it would be useful to address the overall poverty situation in each country. This is particularly important in the Arab States where there are extremely low rates of poverty and hunger.

Poverty is affected by factors included in other MDGs, such as education and unemployment, as well as by economic growth and structural adjustment reforms. These factors, as well as geographical and regional disparity, must be encompassed by the MDGRs in order to study and fight poverty comprehensively and efficiently. On the one hand, addressing these larger economic factors could lead to real, in-depth change. Unfortunately, on the other hand, the factors could be used as an excuse to declare poverty an insurmountable challenge.

It is therefore crucial that MDGRs assess responsibilities and the level of accountability to commitments. In some cases, responsibility for past shortcomings and misguided measures extends to supranational authorities, namely economic and monetary authorities which have encouraged the implementation of structural adjustment reforms responsible for disastrous consequences on national living standards.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it is also important to examine the implications of global institution programmes and policies on national and local development and poverty.

Several indicators were used to measure poverty in the Arab MDGRs including the USD 1 a day indicator, the USD 2 a day indicator, the national poverty line method and the human poverty indicator. The USD 1 a day indicator was used by 9 of the 18 countries, the USD 2 a day indicator by 4 countries, the national poverty line by 15 countries, and the human poverty indicator<sup>6</sup> by 15 countries. In general, Arab countries lack the adequate statistics and comparable data required to identify meaningful trends. For example, most Arab MDGRs claim that there is no extreme poverty in the region. The Saudi Arabia MDGR does not even identify a poverty rate. Instead it calculates unemployment at 15% and talks about "low rates of extreme poverty".

5 Algerian MDGR; in reference to the "support of international financial institutions", p. 7.

6 The Human Poverty Indicator extends beyond income poverty. For developing countries, it includes dimensions of a decent standard of living (percentage of population without sustainable access to an improved water source and percentage of children under weight for age); knowledge (adult literacy rate); and a long and healthy life (probability at birth of not surviving to age 40). Based on the Human Development Report, 2004, United Nations Development Programme, p. 258.

An adequate definition of poverty or the poor has not been reached or adopted in many Arab countries. Lebanon attempted to establish a quality of life indicator called the "Living Conditions Index", which included 11 indicators on housing, water and sewage, education, and income related indicators. It was used to classify individuals and households into five categories of living conditions including very low, low, intermediate, high, and very high. Social Watch is working to produce a quality of life indicator as well,<sup>7</sup> stressing the need to enhance efforts in this area given the importance of good indicators in tackling poverty issues. Accordingly, it would be helpful for analysis and comparison purposes if every MDGR included an annex explaining the details of the adopted indicator.

The Gini index which has the benefit of representing overall wealth disparities in a single number cannot reliably be used to study poverty in the Arab countries because data is lacking or inaccurate. Nor can the poverty gap be studied reliably given the lack of data on poverty rates and income distribution. The Arab MDGRs also lack disaggregated data on poverty even though it would be helpful to look at figures disaggregated by region in order to better understand wealth disparities.

According to World Bank estimates,<sup>8</sup> poverty rates in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)<sup>9</sup> region were calculated at 2.3% in 1990, using the USD 1 a day method. The rate had increased to 2.4% by 2000. The MDGs call for the rate to be halved to 1.2% by 2015. According to these rates, the MENA region has less poverty than East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, if the trend does not change, the region will shift away from the goal instead of moving towards it during the next 10 years.

The World Bank has only managed to examine around seven Arab countries using the USD 1 a day indicator. This indicator should be used with caution since most Arab countries are medium income countries. And it is not useful for measuring poverty in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which are considered high income countries.

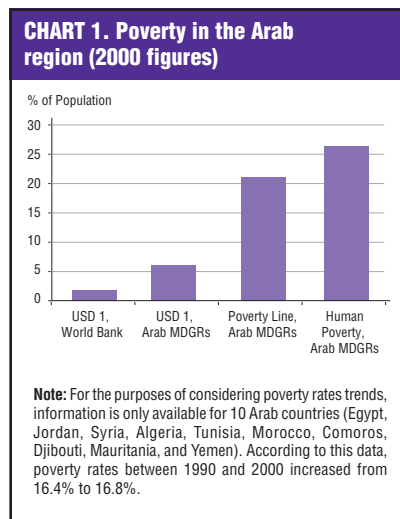
7 Social Watch Philippines has been making important efforts to identify a comprehensive poverty index, and has set up a committee of Social Watch members to follow-up on the project.

8 World Bank. [www.developmentgoals.org/Poverty.htm#povertylevel](http://www.developmentgoals.org/Poverty.htm#povertylevel)

9 The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region does not encompass all Arab countries nor is it limited to them. It includes 17 Arab countries (excluding Sudan, Somalia, Comoros, Mauritania, and Libya) as well as Iran and Israel which are non-Arab countries. However, the Arab countries can be divided into 4 main regions; the Mashrek region (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria); the Maghreb region (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia); the less developed Arab countries (Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen); and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates).

According to the figures in the nine Arab MDGRs which used the USD 1 a day indicator, 7.4% of the population in these countries live on less than USD 1 a day, with these nine countries making up 62.4% of the entire Arab region population.<sup>10</sup> This figure is significantly higher than the international figure of 2.4% presented by the World Bank.

According to the poverty line indicator, which was used in 15 MDGRs,<sup>11</sup> 23% of the population in the Arab region live under the poverty line.<sup>12</sup> But when the Human Poverty indicator is considered, which was also used in 15 MDGRs, 27.1% of the Arab region population are poor.<sup>13</sup>



- 10 The percentage was calculated at 5.6% in the Mashrek region based on data from MDGRs of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria; at 2.9% in the Maghreb region based on the MDGR data of Algeria and Morocco; and 22.2% in the less developed Arab countries based on MDGR data from Comoros, Mauritania, Somalia, and Yemen. No data is available for the GCC countries. The figures used are based on original sources from the Arab MDGRs and supported by preliminary calculations prepared for the yet unpublished 2nd UN Arab MDGR.
- 11 The population of the countries which used the poverty line indicator makes up 79% of the entire Arab region population.
- 12 It reaches 17% in the Mashrek countries based on data from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria; 9.2% in the Maghreb countries based on data from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia; and 48.2% in the less developed Arab countries based on data from all the countries included in this category. The only data available for GCC countries is from Bahrain which indicates 11% poverty.
- 13 25.7% in the Mashrek region based on data from the MDGRs of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; 26% in the Maghreb area based on data from all countries in this region; 35.5% in the less developed Arab countries based on data from Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Sudan, Yemen; and 17.5% in the GCC region based on data from the MDGRs of Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Poverty rates in the Mashrek region decreased from 21.6% to 15.7%, and increased from 7.3% to 9.1% in the Maghreb region. The less developed countries showed a significant increase from 24.8% to 47.1%, while there is no data for the GCC countries. These trends show that the Arab region is not on the right track to achieve the MDGs, and the picture is even gloomier when we consider Arab countries experiencing conflict such as Palestine, Iraq, and Sudan.

### MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Gender inequality is deeply rooted in Arab societies so real change must come from changing attitudes, behaviours, and mentalities. In tackling MDG 3 some Arab MDGRs focused on education, specifically raising awareness about woman rights in this sector. The Algerian MDGR included an assessment of the extent of violence against women (domestic or otherwise). The Egyptian MDGR studied women and unremunerated work, whether in family businesses or in agriculture.<sup>14</sup> Some MDGRs presented the women ratio in decision-making positions as an indicator of disparities in the job market. Indicators showing wage disparities and comparative gender unemployment figures were also used to give insight into discrimination in the labour market. These factors are essential to achieve a comprehensive understanding of all the factors that affect women's status and opportunities in the Arab countries.

Quite a few of the MDGRs did not analyze MDG 3 in a comprehensive enough manner to show the real situation of women in the Arab societies. The 2002 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) finds that Arab countries rank very low according to the UNDP Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).<sup>15</sup> The report also highlights that Arab countries have made important advances regarding girls' education, but points out that the low GEM values were due to the limited participation of women in political organizations. In the 2003 AHDR, several developments in women's empowerment are mentioned, such as the right to vote and stand for election to municipal and legislative assemblies in Bahrain, the election of 33 women to the Moroccan Parliament, the appointment of a woman as State Minister for Human Rights in Yemen and the entrance of one woman into the Yemeni Parliament in the 2003 elections. Yet, it also stresses that "the political emancipation of Arab women which was called for in the first AHDR has a long way to go,

although the new progress is evidence of a greater receptivity to women's empowerment at the executive levels of government and state institutions".<sup>16</sup>

The Saudi Arabian MDGR reported that "a strong supporting environment for gender equality exists in Saudi Arabia... and that the UN works on enhancing the role of women non-governmental organizations and their links with regional and international counterparts and UN agencies".<sup>17</sup> This statement is not backed up by measurable figures and holds no credibility especially when we consider that there are no active women's organizations in the country. Furthermore, it is well known that women's rights are not properly respected in Saudi Arabian society, where they are not allowed to vote or even drive a vehicle.

For this reason it is essential to look at country commitments to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) when measuring MDG progress. Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Kuwait, have ratified the CEDAW. However most of these countries have submitted reservations on the following articles: Article 2 on the legal equality of men and women; Article 9 on nationality and the nationality of children; Article 16 on marriage and family life; Article 29 on disputes and reservations; Article 15 on the movement of persons, freedom of residence choice, civil matters such as administering property; and Article 7 on political and public life including the right to vote and participate in government and public offices. What may appear to be progress and respect of international law could be a cover for widespread discriminatory measures in national laws and among public and private institutions in many Arab countries.

According to World Bank indicators - the main reference used in most MDGRs - the Arab countries in the MENA region have achieved significant progress in gender equity in enrolment rates. Gender equity indicators, such as the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education, show that the MENA region progressed from a ratio of 79 in 1990 to 91 between 1997 and 2001. In 2001, the region ranked above South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa, and below East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although Arab MDGRs proudly referred to these indicators, little was said about the participation of women in decision-making positions. It is important to see how women's participation in political and economic affairs is progressing at both the national and regional levels, not only in lower

14 UNDP. "Egypt Human Development Report 2004. Choosing Decentralization for Good Governance", 2004, [www.undp.org/egy/publications/HDP-2004-E%20.pdf](http://www.undp.org/egy/publications/HDP-2004-E%20.pdf)

15 UNDP. "Arab Human Development Report 2002. Creating Opportunities for Future Generations", [www.undp.org/rbas](http://www.undp.org/rbas); [www.un.org/publications](http://www.un.org/publications)

16 UNDP. "Arab Human Development Report (2003). Building a Knowledge Society", [www.undp.org/rbas](http://www.undp.org/rbas) and [www.un.org/publications](http://www.un.org/publications)

17 UNDP. "Millennium Development Goals Report on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", 2002, [www.undp.org/sa/Reports/MDGR%20SA%20English.pdf](http://www.undp.org/sa/Reports/MDGR%20SA%20English.pdf)

level posts but also in executive and high level posts. Women are still absent from high level meetings of the League of Arab States, and ministerial and trade-related meetings in the region.

### MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development

A global partnership for development has taken on a special importance within the MDG campaign. Some claim that the MDGs are no different than the "Better World for All" document which was prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank, and the UN at the Geneva 2000 Summit, with the addition of an agreement and commitment by developed countries to take responsibility for the process of development through MDG 8. The "Better World for All" document was rejected by developing countries whereas the MDGs were adopted by all developing countries on the belief that a real partnership and commitment to these goals would be shared between both developing and developed countries.

MDG 8 addresses non-discriminatory trading and finance, international debt and aid, youth employment, affordability and availability of essential drugs in developing countries, as well as the benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Not enough attention was given to this particular MDG in the Arab MDGRs.

Although Arab MDGRs talked about the three interlinked factors of trade, aid, and debt, they disregarded any talk about ICTs. These essential factors for building a knowledge society have been directly linked to human development in the 2003 AHDR. They include technology transfer; the acquisition, dissemination, and reproduction of knowledge; freedom of research, expression and information; the use of ICTs in education; and legal management of technologies.

The Jordanian MDGR states that MDG 8 "tackles evolving partnerships for development which require the national economy to participate in and act with the global economy, which in turn includes the level of openness and participation in partnerships and free trade agreements with other countries". The report noted that Jordan is on track to meet MDG 8 by 2015. Jordan has joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), and signed the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership agreement, as well as a bilateral free-trade agreement with the United States. However, it is worth stressing that not all international cooperation is positive. The above statement from the Jordanian MDGR is in direct opposition with the basic perspective of civil society, which does not consider trade an indicator by itself, but rather measures how trade can serve development. For reasons of objectivity CSOs should be included in the analysis of MDG 8 and the entire MDGR preparation process.

In order for trade to be beneficial, the idea that trade must be at the service of development needs must be internalized. Arab countries are still entering into international and bilateral free trade agreements<sup>18</sup> even though they are vague about their ability to develop a Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA). Inter-Arab trade only represents around 8% of total Arab trade.<sup>19</sup> Arab countries are not entering into these trade agreements with a clear idea of their needs, priorities, and expectations. The lack of appropriate and well-defined national policies on various aspects of development puts Arab countries in a weak position when negotiating. A quick glance at economic indicators reflects their feeble situation with low economic growth, high budget deficits, and a critical balance of payments.<sup>20</sup> Technology and knowledge figures are insufficient to build local capacities for adequate integration into the global market, further weakening the role and impact of Arab countries.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to understand why Arab countries have not been able to develop their own regional agreements despite their ability to sign agreements with the United States and the European Union. Arab countries must participate in rather than simply join the global trading system. One must ask whether Arab countries are joining and negotiating the terms of the WTO and other agreements with a full and clear understanding and projection of its impact on their economies.

The main issue of MDG 8 is not the number of trade agreements a country has signed but rather the kind of global partnership which is needed to bring about real change. Countries must choose whether trade or development is the priority before reporting on this goal. The Doha Development Agenda, resulting from the 4<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Meeting, is meant to serve as a reference for national policy measures regarding free trade. But given the actual state of the Doha commitments, fair trade and the idea of trade as a tool for development are far from realistic.

Promoting trade and foreign direct investments (FDI) pushes national governments to present a positive impression of the country. This contradicts the processes linked to debt cancellation and aid which require truthful reporting on socio-economic conditions. The question of whether FDI is in the interest of local needs or in the interest of multinational companies raises the issue of social corporate responsibility, which is still weakly addressed in the Arab countries. National strategies must balance economic and social priorities and a long-term vision for the country with the various social and economic global dynamics.

### Roles of governments, UN agencies, international financial institutions, and CSOs

Most MDGRs stressed the importance of strong and consolidated partnerships, coherence of efforts and information-sharing for a successful campaign. "It is important to know who should do what to avoid duplication of efforts and achieve better coordination. In addition, strategic partnerships need to be identified and alliances built at a national and/or regional level to achieve the MDGs. This is how all stakeholders could be involved with decision-making and be aware of who is doing what as well as who should do what".<sup>22</sup>

It is clear that these relationships and coordination have not been developed in the Arab countries, where governments have been processing the MDGR in close coordination with UN agencies, such as the UNDP. In others countries, the governments had limited roles while the UN led the process. Yet, even where governments were involved, their involvement was limited to public institutions, which reflects an incomplete and weak national commitment and an ineffective governmental role. The Arab governments have not appeared interested in establishing a good relationship with CSOs and the business sector since most Arab countries excluded them from the MDGR process.

Two issues need to be considered regarding the role of CSOs:

- The advisory role of CSOs in MDG policy formulation and strategic planning should be highly appreciated by other groups including governments and UN agencies. If this role is not respected, as is the case of all Arab countries, then CSOs should be strongly involved in advocacy campaigns in order to voice their concerns and perspectives.
- It is important to look at whether CSOs have been able to shift successfully from the awareness-raising phase to the implementation phase of the MDG campaign in order to assess real changes in people's lives.

18 Eleven Arab countries are members of the WTO (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Djibouti, and Mauritania). Seven more are observers (Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Sudan Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Algeria). Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, and Bahrain have entered into bilateral free trade agreements with the United States. All Arab Southern Mediterranean countries have association agreements with the European Union, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Libya, and Lebanon, while the negotiations with Syria have been concluded in October 2004 in preparations to sign the agreement. The process for the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement, called for by the League of Arab states in the early 1960s, due to be launched in 2007, only started at the beginning of 2005.

19 Arabic News. "Increasing Arab states inter-trade, regional economic integration an absolute imperative", 4 December 2001, [www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/010412/2001041230.html](http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/010412/2001041230.html)

20 UNDP 2002, *op cit*.

21 UNDP 2003, *op cit*.

22 UNDP. South and West Asia sub regional resource facility. "Localizing the MDGs".



In a series of national meetings on the role of Arab CSOs in the MDG campaign,<sup>23</sup> participants stressed the importance of issues in the pre-implementation and pre-action stage that were part of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development in 1995. They emphasized the need to consider NGOs as real partners and to apply good governance at local and national levels. They noted the need to create an enabling environment for CSOs to perform their role. Participants stressed the importance of organizing a widespread campaign to publicize the MDGs, and to elaborate a specific and detailed document to evaluate what needs to be done by all stakeholders in order to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

Also discussed was the need for CSOs to actively participate in the elaboration of the MDGRs in order to enhance the credibility of the reports and to put forward CSOs' perspective on progress. This did not occur in the elaboration of any of the 18 MDGRs published so far even though by doing so they could have voiced their views and concerns about the national MDG campaigns and the information produced by the Arab governments. The capacity of CSOs to play this role, as well as their transparency, accountability, awareness, efficiency, and ability to lead advocacy campaigns for the MDGs should also be considered.

The MDG work plans cannot be separated from the policies that are being advocated by multilateral institutions. Social policies in developing countries have been adjusted according to structural adjustment policies recommended by the World Bank, leading to negative socio-economic impacts. Currently, most developing countries including Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti, are working on their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers with the intention of offsetting these negative impacts.<sup>24</sup>

The UN Millennium Project's latest report entitled *Investing in Development* says that each country should prepare an "MDG based poverty reduction strategy that should be a detailed operational document attached to a medium term expenditure framework which translates the strategy into budgetary outlays."<sup>25</sup> A participatory approach for the preparation of a 10-year framework for action based on poverty mapping by locality, region and gender, and including a 3- to 5-year MDG-based poverty reduction strategy is needed in order to successfully achieve this step. Comprehensive and well-monitored national MDG campaigns and MDGRs which propose strategies and work plans instead

of mere descriptions and blown-up figures are also needed. Unfortunately these factors are not among Arab countries' strong points.

In order to enhance the role of multilateral organizations in the MDG campaign at national levels, the coherence between the policies advocated by these organizations, including the World Bank and the UN, must be addressed. The balance of roles between organizations must also be examined, as well as any possible conflict of power between them.

Translating the strategies into budgetary outlays means that there must be real, effective, and constructive parliamentary participation in the MDGR preparation and content analysis. MDGRs should inform Parliament's work plans. Parliament should also assess and evaluate them, and later hold governments accountable for their role in their implementation. However this has not happened yet in Arab countries.

The identification of effective roles for players in the MDG campaign is necessary for successful cooperation and coordination. However, this process is directly linked to good governance, rule of law, political and social rights, public administration accountability and efficiency, sound economic policy, supportive environments for association, the role of CSOs, as well as participation in general. These are the basic values of human rights, democracy, and good governance that have been advocated for and included in the Millennium Declaration and are the pre-requisites for any steps taken towards achieving the MDGs.

The ability to carry out a comprehensive campaign or work plan instead of separate activities is linked to successfully addressing the distribution of roles. A proper identification of roles could enhance the coordination of efforts, thus avoiding resource misallocations and duplication. Therefore the *Investing in Development* report recommended that "each country should convene an MDG strategy group chaired by the national government and including bilateral and multilateral donors, UN specialized agencies, provincial and local authorities, domestic civil society leaders, including women's organizations which are traditionally underrepresented".<sup>26</sup> This is an initial step towards improving the coordination of efforts and information-sharing at national levels.

### Ending notes

CSOs in the Arab region are leading a struggle in two directions. First, to develop advocacy strategies that will enable them to improve their role, effectiveness, and impact on policy-making at the national level. Second, to fight for their right to exist and operate freely, which is restricted by the re-

gimes that are currently in power in most Arab states. Therefore, when talking about national and regional campaigns, one should stress the need to empower CSOs and enable them to increase their influence on the formation of national policy.

Arab CSOs should realize that the MDGs can serve as an effective advocacy tool, and offer an important opportunity for creating an agenda with defined objectives and targets while taking advantage of their Government's commitments, international support, and the umbrella provided by the global MDG campaign. The global campaign should support CSOs in developing countries, specifically in the Arab region. ■

23 ANND organized a series of national meetings in Sudan, Yemen, Bahrain and the Gulf countries, and Egypt on the role of civil society organizations in the MDG campaign.

24 World Bank. "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers by Region", [http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/prsp\\_deliveries.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/prsp_deliveries.pdf)

25 UN Millennium Project. "Investing in Development", [www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/fullreport.htm](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/fullreport.htm)

26 *Ibid.*

