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Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment In the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Regional Perspective

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I. Background

The objective of this paper is to bring women's issues and gender related concerns in the Arab region to the centre of the debate on post 2015 Development Agenda, in connection with both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More specifically, the paper attempts to shed light on the implementation experience of the MDGs and lessons learnt, especially in regard to Arab women. It also addresses the SDGs and their future implications for women's empowerment and gender equality in the region. The paper attempts to shed light on the experience of the MDGs, lessons learnt, and their future implications for women's empowerment and gender equality, particularly for Arab women. The analysis concludes with the recommendation for countries in the region to align their national development priorities with their human rights obligations aimed at ensuring equality and non-discrimination for all. The paper draws on desk review of recent literature on the Rio+20 outcome document, and on MDGs progress as well as on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including various relevant high level reports on this issue. It concludes with policy options for consideration towards the formulation of more inclusive and responsive development agenda in the Arab region rooted in principles of accountability, equality and human rights.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – commonly known as Rio+20 - resulted in a focused political outcome document, “the Future We Want”, which contains clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development. With this document, Member States launched a process geared towards the formulation of a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals, and ultimately converge with the post 2015 development agenda. Since then, the international community has been engaged in various paths to realize “the Future We Want”, such as the establishment of High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP), and the launching of the Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs. These processes have resulted into a broad agreement for the adoption of a single development framework in 2015 containing set of goals that are universally applicable to all countries, yet adaptable to national priorities.

As the intergovernmental dialogue for the SDGs formulation proceeds, global discussions seem to agree on the necessity to eradicate extreme poverty while putting sustainable development and addressing inequality at the core.¹ In this context, a broad consensus has emerged on the notion that addressing poverty should be interlinked with addressing inequalities, particularly gender inequality – all within an integrated and transformative framework rooted in a commitment to human security and environmental protection. Indeed, the international community emphasized in the Rio+20 outcome document that: “gender equality and the effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development”² (emphasis added). Additionally, it reaffirmed “the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development,” and underscored the collective decision “to accelerate the implementation of our respective commitments in this regard as contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as Agenda 21, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.”³ Similarly, the Report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, the UN

¹ United Nations, High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, A New Global Partnership, (2013) , p.7-8

² Rio +20 Outcome Document, “The Future We Want”, A/RES/66/288, p.46

³ *Ibid.*

Development Group Report “A Million Voices”, the Global Compact Report on Corporate Sustainability, the Secretary-General’s Report and the Outcome document of “the special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals” have all emphasized the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment to sustainable development and to any new development framework.

II. Successes and Shortcomings of MDGs

In recent years, the MDGs have been subjected to intensive critical readings aimed at highlighting their successes and failures. For one, it has been repeatedly argued that commitments to the MDGs at all levels were hampered by the top down approach adopted at their initiations in determining priorities, challenges and strategies. On the other hand, it has also been well acknowledged that the significance of the MDGs lies in their attempt to bring together an inspirational common vision with a set of concrete and time-bound goals and measurable targets. To that effect, there are indications that the MDGs agenda has indeed succeeded to a certain extent in asserting some of the basic dimensions of human development and in strengthening international cooperation for development. The MDGs framework has helped to galvanize development efforts and guide global and national priorities.

Nevertheless, the MDGs have been subjected to significant criticism in terms of their basic structures and foundations, implementation process, and defined targets. For one and as a start, the MDGs have been faulted for their failure to operationalize key values underscored in the Millennium Declaration as prerequisite for enhancing human development, such as peace and security, human rights and governance.⁴ The MDGs also fell short of addressing issues of productive employment, violence against women, social protection, inequalities, and social exclusion, to name a few. Criticism has also been directed to the focus of MDGs on end results rather than on the means to achieve them.⁵ In addition to narrowly defined and gender blind targets and indicators, it was left up to each country to decide upon the desired development approach or policy framework to achieve most of the set goals, and mostly outside the context of a well defined accountability framework. That led to uneven progress among goals, within countries, and across countries and regions. According to *the Millennium Development Goals Report 2013*⁶, the world has reached the poverty reduction target five years ahead of schedule. In developing regions, the proportion of people living on less than USD \$1.25 a day fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to 22 per cent in 2010. Extreme poverty is also falling in every region. Nevertheless, the gender gap in employment persists, with a 24.8 percentage point difference between men and women in the employment-to-population ratio in 2012.

Indeed, given the nature of the MDGs as declaratory political commitments, the failure to link them up with international human rights and other related instruments has posed the challenge on the ability to hold states accountable for their commitments.⁷ Have they been aligned with international treaty standards and principles, these commitments would have become a matter of legal obligation rather than discretion.⁸ The human rights based approach⁹

⁴ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda: Governance and Development, (2012), P.6

⁵ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda: Review of the Contributions of the MDG Agenda to foster development: lessons for the post 2015 UN development agenda (2012), P.9

⁶ See generally, United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report*, (2013)

⁷ OHCHR/ CESR, *Who Will Be Accountable? Human Rights and The Post 2015 Development Agenda*, (2013), P. ix

⁸ *Ibid.*

is most essential for a development process that is rooted in equality and efficiency. Human rights, in all their encompassing social, economic, political and civil dimensions, are embedded in the UN Charter and various conventions and treaties.¹⁰ States that signed these treaties are committed (and therefore obliged) to providing universal access to basic social rights, dismantle discrimination, achieve substantive equality, and ensure the availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, adaptability and quality of services.¹¹

In the same vein, addressing inequalities is fundamental to the realization of human development goals, human rights and economic stability. Since the Millennium declaration, concerns around inequalities have become more prominent. The view that global and national inequalities have grown significantly in recent decades is widely held, as evidenced in relevant statistics and data. Rising inequalities have also been a concern in every country – of both developing and developed economies. Such inequalities constitute both a cause and a consequence of poverty and together, hold back progress on all development goals.¹²

In line with these views, a consensus has been emerging towards the notion that the future development agenda must be rights-based, must build on existing normative agreements and commitments, must be transformative, must directly tackle all levels and forms of inequality and structural discrimination, and must be accountable and transparent in order to enable people (and civil society at large) to hold governments to account. It is also clearly agreed that a new generation of goals must combine eradicating poverty with economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Much of this is reflected in the Secretary-General's report *A Life Of Dignity For All: Accelerating Progress Towards The Millennium Development Goals And Advancing The United Nations Development Agenda Beyond 2015*¹³. The Report sets out an ambitious rights-based vision for a post-2015 development agenda – an agenda that addresses the challenges of sustainability, ending extreme poverty, and meaningful development, all in a holistic and comprehensive manner. This agenda is universal, applies at once to developed and developing countries, based on the fact that many of today's challenges are global and making progress depends on tackling them together. This proposed agenda is transformative, that addresses rising inequality and brings about real change in people's lives. To quote the Secretary General again, "[a]ll countries need to recognize the profound transformations required to address the emerging challenges of sustainable development. These include economic shifts to sustainable patterns of production and consumption, effective governance and a renewed global partnership and means of implementation."¹⁴

The consensus reached by the world's leaders in Rio+20 is to develop universal goals to combine both agendas: sustainability and development. In this context, a wide support exists for a post-2015 unified framework setting out universally accepted goals that could also be tailored to national realities and priorities. In setting out this ambitious agenda, the Secretary

⁹ Human rights based approach ensures that "Human rights standards contained in, and principles derived from, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments guide all development cooperation and programming in all sectors and in all phases of the programming process. Development cooperation contributes to the development of the capacities of 'duty-bearers' to meet their obligations and/or of 'rights-holders' to claim their rights" see <http://hrbportal.org/>, accessed 6/09/2013

¹⁰ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda: Realizing the Future We Want for All, (2012), P.23

¹¹ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda: Towards Freedom from Fear and Want, (2012), P.4

¹² See generally, United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report, (2013)

¹³ It will be referred to as "A Life of Dignity for All" for easier reference.

¹⁴ UN Secretary General Report, A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, (2013), p.19

General's Report, *A Life of Dignity for All*, reflects the views (with no exaggeration) of hundreds of thousands of people the world over who have participated in 11 thematic, five regional and 88 country consultations. People everywhere are calling for transformative change, to eradicate poverty, achieve sustainable development, human rights, equality, justice and security. One of the issues that has emerged most strongly through these consultations is the need to tackle inequalities and structural discrimination in the new development agenda, especially gender inequality and gender-based discrimination which was identified as underpinning and reinforcing all other forms of inequality. Hence, people are calling for the new development agenda to prioritize women's issues. The international and global dimensions of inequality need also to be addressed and this must include measures against divisive forces, such as international trade, finance and taxation, climate change and representation in global decision making.

III. Addressing Gender Inequality in MDGs

A review of MDG3 - the goal which aims to "Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" - indicates that it has indeed succeeded in bringing a gender perspective into the broader development agenda and in increasing political will towards the realization of the needs and priorities of women and girls. The main success of MDG3 has been concretely putting forward the target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels of education no later than 2015. It specifically lists the following indicators:

1. Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education;
2. Ratio of literate females to males of 15-24 year olds;
3. Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector;
4. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

However, the progress achieved thus far on the implementation of MDG3 shows no advancement in terms of structural transformation in gender relations.¹⁵ This is mostly related to the limitations of the targets and the indicators listed above, generally advanced outside overall national socio-economic and political contexts. The UN system Task Team affirmed that "[g]ender equality has long been recognized both as a human right and a core development goal. In addition, discrimination against women and girls impairs progress in all other areas of development."¹⁶ Many argued that women's poverty is partly caused by gender inequality. The unequal distribution of income, unequal access to work opportunities, women's lack of decision-making power, gender based violence, and discriminatory laws, all contribute to women's poverty.¹⁷ Additionally, it was argued that gender inequality continues to be one of the most persistent forms of inequality and discrimination in all societies.¹⁸ This led to the following conclusion: "a new post 2015 Development Agenda should therefore include not only a universal goal for gender equality and the empowerment and advancement of women and girls, but also ensure that gender and other dominant inequalities are mainstreamed in all relevant areas through disaggregated targets and indicators."¹⁹

¹⁵ UN Women, *A Stand Alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment: Imperatives and Key Components*, (2013), p.1

¹⁶ UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda: *Towards Freedom from Fear and Want*, (2012) P. 8

¹⁷ UN Women, *Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance* (2009)

¹⁸ See <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/299198>

¹⁹ See <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/>

The most recent report related to the MDGs indicates that “[w]hether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives.”²⁰ The main problem is that gender (and women’s issues) is narrowly defined in the MDGs. As noted above, “the MDG3 on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment includes only one target on education as well as narrow indicators on women’s political representation and employment. As formulated, gender had little to do with the other indicators relating to the environment, poverty and hunger and governance.”²¹ Furthermore, gaps in the MDG framework, such as the absence of targets on violence against women and women’s property ownership, contributed to its failure in achieving structural change. As indicated in the High Level Panel report:

“These barriers can only be removed when there is zero tolerance of violence against and exploitation of women and girls, and when they have full and equal rights in political, economic and public spheres. Women and girls must have equal access to financial services, infrastructure, the full range of health services including SRHR [Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights], water and sanitation, the equal right to own land and other assets, a safe environment in which to learn and apply their knowledge and skills, and an end to discrimination so they can receive equal pay for equal work, and have an equal voice in decision-making.”²²

The Secretary General in his report, *A Life of Dignity for All*, emphasized that “[g]ender-based violence contravenes women’s and girls’ rights, undermines development and is an affront to our common humanity”.²³

To be truly transformative, it is therefore agreed that the new framework should tackle three core areas: ensuring freedom from violence for all women and girls; strengthening women’s capacities and equal access to resources; and ensuring women’s voice, leadership and participation. It needs to set out what women and girls want and need, how the State can deliver, and how men and boys can and should contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment in all goals.²⁴

IV. Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals

It is well-established that sustainable development benefits from women's empowerment. The report of Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing*, concluded that any serious shift towards sustainable development requires gender equality and gender equality was recognized as one of the fundamentals of development.²⁵ Every day women take decisions that affect sustainable development, be it the use of water or energy. At the same time, women have

²⁰ United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013, p.5

²¹ Alexandra Spielfoch, Gender Equality in the Post-2015 Agenda, (2013), P.4

²² United Nations, High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, A New Global Partnership, (2013) , p.17

²³ UN Secretary General Report, A Life Of Dignity For All: Accelerating Progress Towards The Millennium Development Goals And Advancing The United Nations Development Agenda Beyond 2015, (2013), p.5

²⁴ United Nations, High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, A New Global Partnership, (2013) , p.34-35

²⁵ Report High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing, A/66/700, p.84

contributed to sustainable solutions for current environmental, economic and social problems. When women have equal access to resources and opportunities to participate in decision making processes they become drivers of sustainable development by taking environmental, economic and social action.

Additionally, many of the areas that have been put on the table as suggestions for the Sustainable Development Goals are linked to disparities, and policy gaps. Just to name a few: food security and agriculture, water and energy, land degradation, desertification and deforestation. These are all linked to poverty and to gender inequality as noted above. But in order to address inequality, the post 2015 development agenda must go beyond closing disparities and gaps and tackle the structural issues and multiple forms of discrimination that generate inequalities, include gender inequality. Multiple forms of discrimination are the reality for many people around the world, including on the basis of age and other factors such as ethnicity and disability.

The new framework should therefore preserve the inclusivity and participation of all and priorities are to be determined accordingly and collectively. Reflecting on the past experience of the MDGs across the world, gender equality has also been identified (anew) at the core of the development agenda. It has been well argued that approaching the gender issues in the post-2015 framework should be through a twin track approach - a combination of a standalone goal and gender incorporated in all other goals, targets and indicators. A stand alone goal on gender inequalities that is *complemented*, across all goal areas of the framework, *by targets and indicators that focus* on the major drivers of inequalities in the economic, social, environmental, cultural and/or political domains. As such, the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, *A New Global Partnership*, proposed a goal and targets (box below) on Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality, while mainstreamed gender perspective in other goals' targets and indicators in support of the twin-track approach²⁶:

Goal 2: EMPOWER GIRLS AND WOMEN AND ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

- a) Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against girls and women;
- b) End child marriage;
- c) Ensure equal right of women to own and inherit property, sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account;
- d) Eliminate discrimination against women in political, economic, and public life.

V. MDG3 in the Arab Region

The MDGs have over the years gained widespread acceptance across the Arab region. Governments have gradually adopted the goals and worked on reflecting them in their national development plans. On many occasions, they reiterated their commitments to achieve the MDG targets by 2015 with concrete steps to integrate them in their adopted policies and programmes.²⁷

²⁶ United Nations, High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, *A New Global Partnership*, (2013), Annex I, p.30-31

²⁷ ESCWA, *The Third Arab Report On The Millennium Development Goals 2010 And The Impact Of The Global Economic Crises*, (2010), P.1

As a result, the region on the whole has witnessed improvements at various socioeconomic levels. Significant progress has been especially made in the realization of health and education goals within most countries. This was manifested in an overall improvement in school enrolment rates, literacy of young adults aged 15-24, and infant mortality rates.²⁸ Many more girls than boys are enrolled in primary school in the region; Gender Parity Index (GPI) for primary education reached 0.93 in 2011.²⁹

In terms of MDG3 on gender equality specifically, governments in the region adopted measures towards meeting indicated targets, resulting indeed in improvements in certain areas, such as the increase in women's life expectancy and the decrease in maternal mortality ratios³⁰. Similarly, progress has been achieved in women's literacy rates and in their access to all educational levels, which resulted in most countries in the region in reducing gender disparity in access to education, at least at the primary level.

However, the region continues to suffer from persistent poverty and inequality.³¹ Uneven development and disparities (at every level and on every basis, including gender) are predominant within most countries,³² and the prospects of meeting the MDGs by their set deadline are not promising. Gaps in the political, economic and legal spheres continue to set apart men and women, urban and rural, and various social groups in terms of rights, benefits, participation and access to resources.³³ These gaps are directly ascribed to the failure in most countries to adopt a holistic approach to development in a manner that introduces and enforces structural and institutional changes.

Challenges in meeting the MDGs in the Arab region have been linked to "slow progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and the low priority given to gender mainstreaming in national development plans."³⁴ Indeed, gender inequality persists in countries across the region and is often deeply rooted in discrimination and injustice in differential access to legal systems or social and economic resources. Progress reports on MDGs show that Arab women are disadvantaged in terms of their political and economic participation and rights.³⁵ Women's role in decision making, despite some recent progress, remains very limited and lowest compared to other regions. Available figures indicate that, for instance, women in parliaments in the Arab region stood at 13.3% in 2012,³⁶ while their economic participation continues to be considered the lowest in the world.³⁷ Improvements in educational performance across the region have not been translated in greater employment opportunities or equal political representation.

The 2010 Third Arab Report on Millennium Development Goals and the Impact of the Global Economic Crises reveals women's low rates of secondary education enrolment, significant underrepresentation in national parliaments and in positions of decision-making, and wide

²⁸ ESCWA, *A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda*, (2013), P.31

²⁹ ESCWA, *The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking beyond 2015*, (2013), p. 22

³⁰ "The regional maternal mortality ratio has decreased by 27 per cent between 1990 and 2010". see ESCWA, *A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda*, (2013), P.30

³¹ *Ibid*, P.64

³² United Nations Development Group, *The Arab Development Forum*, (2013), P.5

³³ ESCWA, *The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking beyond 2015*, (2013), p.68

³⁴ ESCWA, *Progress in the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the ESCWA Region: A Gender Lens*, (2011), P.13

³⁵ *The Arab Reports on MDGs 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2013*

³⁶ ESCWA/ ECW, *The Political Participation of Women*, E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/1

³⁷ ESCWA/ ECW, *Addressing Barriers to Women's Economic Participation in the ESCWA Region*, (2012)

gaps in access to decent employment, wage earnings, and access to justice.³⁸ Additionally, violence against women and girls remains one of the region's biggest challenges, deterring women and girls from fully participating in all aspects of society.³⁹

Despite a general dearth of available and reliable data in the region, existing data emanating from national surveys on violence against women that had been conducted in several countries do reveal the strong prevalence of this problem across the region. With regard to incidences of domestic violence against women, in Algeria, for example, a survey has concluded that 9000 cases of abuse were reported and, around 50 per cent of those victims were young women between 23-40 years old. In two thirds of these reported cases, the husband was the aggressor, with violence often inflicted in the presence of children. In Jordan, a national survey pointed out that one in three ever-married women aged 15-49 years reported being subjected to physical violence. Prevalence of violence was more than twice as high among divorced women as among currently married female respondents.⁴⁰

With respect to perceptions on violence against women, a survey in Egypt shown that around 30 percent of ever-married women in the sample believe a husband is justified in beating his wife if she goes out without his permission, neglects her children, or refuses to have sexual intercourse with him. And in Sudan, a survey revealed an overall decrease in support of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), with around 45 per cent of women aged 15-49 years indicating approval. It was also interesting to observe that the economic status of women can also play an important factor since the poorer the respondent, the more likely their approval of FGM. Yet, one in three of the richest wealth quintile indicated they intended to circumcise their daughters.⁴¹

Additionally, rates of early marriage are in increase among refugee population in the region. It was reported that over 50% of Syrian women refugees were married before age 18.⁴² In some cases, families in refugee settings resort to early marriage, usually to an older male relative, as a safeguard to their 'honour' or to hide the fact that a girl has been raped. Families are often resort to forced marriage or early marriage of their daughters in most cases for financial support.⁴³ One survey identified that refugee families in Jordan had come to

“Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”

Source: *The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*

³⁸ ESCWA, The Third Arab Report On The Millennium Development Goals 2010 And The Impact Of The Global Economic Crises, (2010), P. 36

³⁹ ESCWA, The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report: Facing Challenges and Looking beyond 2015, (2013), p.25

⁴⁰ ESCWA/ECW, Combating Domestic Violence against Women and Girls: Policies to Empower Women in the Arab Region, (2013)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>.P. 29

⁴³ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>.

experience economic dependence on dowries as an income supplement, and in some cases dowries had become a primary or secondary component of household income.⁴⁴

Progress in regard to women's equality in the Arab region is hindered by the prevalence of discriminatory national legislation in personal status laws, criminal codes, labour regulations and policies. Gender inequality is rather seen as a structural obstacle, which undermines overall progress and prevents achieving development goals for all in the region.⁴⁵ It has been well established that most of the MDG implementation efforts did address the symptoms instead of the root causes of gender inequality. The process did not entwine MDG3 with the broader development approach and with the legal obligations of Member States under international treaties and frameworks.

As has been noted in various other parts of the world, challenges in implementing a successful development agenda in the region are also rooted in the top bottom approach of its initiation and formulation. National stakeholders did not participate effectively in the MDGs' process, which as a result undermined the sense of ownership of the MDGs and their targets, especially within civil society. Such marginalization impacted the realization of the MDGs, particularly MDG3. Furthermore, National Women Machineries (NWMs) in the region - acknowledged as an essential stakeholder in the overall development path and in ensuring gender equality and women's advancement in all national policies and programs - have had limited and inconsistent involvement in the process of implementing the MDGs as well as in monitoring and evaluating progress. Their role has been limited at best, to their participation in the steering committees established by planning ministries and provision of data when available.

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) recommended the establishment of national women's machineries in order to "design, promote the implementation of, execute, monitor, evaluate, advocate and mobilize support for policies that promote the advancement of women."⁴⁶ Most Arab countries have now established such entities, with some formed as specialized ministries concerned with women's affairs and other related categories, while others designated as committees or councils for women's affairs.⁴⁷ Their role is considered to be vital with regard to ensuring that the gender perspective is reflected in development policies, strategies and programs pursued by their respective governments. The exclusion of NWMs from the MDGs process in the region has undermined the reflection of women's key concerns on both national and international agendas, and in turn resulted in weakening the process itself.

VI. Post-2015 Regional Priorities and Proposed Policy Options

In its participation in the consultative process for the post-development, the Arab region has on the whole endorsed the general emerging consensus indicated above. Principles of equality, human rights and governance were indeed echoed during *the Arab Development Forum: Priorities for the Post 2015 Development Agenda in the Arab Countries (April 2013)*.

P. 38

⁴⁴ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 31

⁴⁵ The Arab Reports on MDGs 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2013

⁴⁶ Beijing Platform for Action 1995, para. 196

⁴⁷ ESCWA/ ECW, Review of the Performance Assessment of National Machineries for the Advancement of Women in Mainstreaming: A Gender Perspective in the Arab Countries, (2010)

In addition to the values enshrined in the UN Charter and international human rights treaties, equity, resilience, sustainability, accountability and participation stood out as particularly important to voices from the Arab region.⁴⁸ A 2013 UN regional commissions' report highlights the priorities of the Arab region for the Post 2015 Development Agenda as follows: "1. Ensure human rights, freedoms and social justice in order to promote inclusive and equitable development; 2. Strengthen governance, effective institutions, democracy and the rule of law; 3. End the occupation of Palestine; address the root causes and foster the resolutions of conflict and war, as well as their regional spillover effects; 4. Address the different dimensions of poverty and exclusion; reduce the different dimensions of inequality – income, geographical and social (gender, age, ethnic, etc.) – and promote human development."⁴⁹

Moreover, the priorities of the region were put forward with an indication of a clear message on gender equality and women's empowerment. In line with prevailing thinking on this issue, voices from the region advocated for a twin track approach to gender equality in the new development framework. "[T]he post 2015 agenda needs to move from the mere mainstreaming of gender equality, to gender equity⁵⁰ as central to any new development paradigm and not a mere by-product of certain policies focused on numerical goals".⁵¹ As such, gender equality and women's empowerment are identified as a key priority for the Arab region to be addressed comprehensively.⁵² It has been advanced that targets addressing violence against women and girls and on women's legal rights should be clearly included and fully addressed in the future Arab development agenda.⁵³

To overcome the shortcomings of the MDGs and build on lessons learned in the previous experience, national ownership of the post-2015 development agenda⁵⁴, its formulation and its implementation has been highlighted across the board, calling for full involvement of all stakeholders. In this context, the role of National Women's Machineries -- as national custodians of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment -- comes into play. The centrality of their involvement in the process and to its prospects for success is evident. At this point, however, it remains unclear, based on the various post-2015 consultation reports, whether the NWMs have been indeed properly involved and if their input has been effectively reflected. Drawing on their unique role in bringing gender related issues to the core of national development, it is essential that their mandate is supported with greater commitment to full inclusion at every step related to the post-2015 process and its ultimate outcomes. In this connection, a system of accountability is to be reflected to ensure checks and balances and delineate clear roles and responsibilities for all.

In conclusion and based on the above analysis, this paper proposes the following formulation for a goal that tackles gender equality.

⁴⁸United Nations Development Group, Arab Development forum, (2013) P.4

⁴⁹ ESCWA, A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, P.85

⁵⁰ As such, **Gender Equality** means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. **Gender Equity** means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women. Gender equity is the process to achieve gender equality. Please see <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

⁵¹ Declaration of Civil Society Organizations from the Arab Region on the Post-2015 Framework (2013), p.8

⁵² ESCWA, A Regional Perspective on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, (2013) P.69

⁵³ United Nations Development Group, The Arab Development Forum, (2013), P.8

⁵⁴ United Nations, A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, A/68/202, p.6

The goal on “**Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality and the Full Realization of Women’s Human Rights**” should target:

- a. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls;
- b. End child marriage;
- c. End discrimination against women in political, economic, and public life.

Moreover, gender perspective should be mainstreamed with the aim of including gender equality related issues at the center of policy decisions and institutional structures:

Goal 3 Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning

- a. Increase in the number of girls completing quality education at all levels

Goal 4 Ensure Healthy Lives

- a. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights

Goal 8 Create Jobs, Sustainable Livelihoods and Equitable Growth

- a. Increase the number of women in good and decent jobs

Goal 9 Manage Natural Resource Assets Sustainably

- a. Ensure women’s participation in environmental policy making processes

Goal 11 Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies

- a. Ensure women’s participation in peace and security
- b. Enhance the capacity, professionalism and accountability of the security forces, police and judiciary in general, and specifically on gender related issues.

In addition, Arab countries could consider the following policy options to maximize and ensure the benefits of an evolving post-2015 process for all, men and women. These proposed options build on two principles: (1) the post-2015 era affords a timely opportunity for the region to look back at its development path, reconsider its approach, and address identified gaps and shortcomings with the involvement of all; and (2) women’s rights and gender equality are evidently at the core of effective and sustainable development, especially at a time when the region is undergoing changes and facing prospects that have gender issues at their very foundation.

1. Align national and sub-national goals and targets with State’s legal obligations under international treaties;
2. Institute a monitoring, reviewing, and accountability framework on progress on agreed commitments (as stated in the MDGs and beyond) with robust inclusive country-owned mechanisms that account clearly for the role of all stakeholders, mainly NWMs as well as civil society actors. As such, the *adaptation* of future global goals to national targets and indicators should be the result of *inclusive and highly participatory processes* where women and men, as well as girls and boys engage in matters that concern them. Meaningful participation will be supported by measures to strengthen the capacity and coverage of national and sub-national *monitoring and evaluation, data collection and analysis*. These will need to track the impact of policies, legislation, budgets and programmes among those most disadvantaged and excluded; allow for truly participatory assessment of these measures; enable much

more systematic disaggregation of information for equality-focused targets and indicators; and provide mechanisms for *locally-led monitoring and feedback* on progress and performance. Such components of a new framework, together, will provide the basis for well-informed and transparent policy-making.

3. Activate the role of NWMs with a support structure that allows them to contribute to global debates about the content of the new post-2015 framework, and influence the positions drawn up by their countries and other relevant actors, so as to ensure that new universal development commitments are firmly grounded in the articulated priorities of Arab women;
4. Engage NWMs in the post-2015 development agenda process as it materializes at the national and regional levels, especially as it relates to adapting goals, targets and indicators to reflect at once internationally-agreed principles as well as regional and national specificities.