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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Equality in the New Global Agenda

Integrating a Gender Perspective in the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2 in the Arab Region



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Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in New York in September 2015,¹ comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets that cover issues such as poverty eradication, food security and improved nutrition, gender equality and justice for all.

In the Declaration introducing the Agenda, Member States affirm: “Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities”² Gender equality and the empowerment of women thus do not only constitute a separate goal (SDG 5) but are perceived as a cross-cutting and critical development issue.

A close analysis of the Agenda however reveals that some gender issues should be further emphasized in the 17 goals in order to attain social justice and gender equality. The Goals and targets should also be adapted to regional, national and local contexts. In its Interim Reference Guide to United Nations Country Teams, the United Nations Development Group recommends the adaptation of the Agenda as a strategy for effective implementation: "Tailoring the SDGs to national contexts involves a multi-stage process whereby initial recommendations are made for addressing gaps and then undertaking a more in-depth systems analysis to prepare the foundation for creating policy coherence, identifying synergies and translating intermediate targets into national policy frameworks, including recognition of the interconnectedness of national, transnational, regional and global policy frameworks."³

This Policy Brief presents an analysis of SDGs 1 and 2 on ending poverty and hunger from a gender perspective. It highlights the gaps, proposes an adaptation of these Goals to the context of the Arab region, and ends with concrete policy recommendations.

Goal 1. End Poverty in all its Forms Everywhere

A. Time poverty: an overlooked gender dimension?

Goal 1 includes five targets, one of which specifically mentions the rights of women to economic resources in terms of access, ownership and control, basic services, and such empowering tools as technology and financial services (box 1).

The implementation mechanisms identified in the Agenda are sufficient mobilization of resources and sound policy frameworks.

In 2011, one billion persons were still living in extreme poverty, but sex-disaggregated data on the subject were not available, partly because measures of poverty relied on income and consumption surveys conducted at the household level rather than the individual level.⁴ It is established, however, that women do not have equal access to financial resources, credit, land and technology compared with men: they own less than 15 per cent of land worldwide and less than 2 per cent of properties in the developing world.⁵ The informal slogan of the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) was "women do two thirds of the world's work, receive 10 per cent of the world's income and own 1 per cent of the means of production."⁶

Box 1. Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- 1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.
- 1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.
- 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.
- 1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.
- 1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

Although it covers important issues, SDG 1 does not mention an important problem that exacerbates women's poverty and aggravates inequality, namely 'time poverty'. Women perform most of the care work necessary for sustaining families and communities, including cooking, cleaning, raising children, caring for old and ill people, and collecting water, fuel and wood for the household. These tasks are time consuming and often limit women's chances of engaging in income-generating activities. Women spend a global average of 4.5 hours a day, twice as men do, on unpaid work, with the gap between genders ranging from 45 minutes in Scandinavia to 5 hours in India.⁷ Closing this gap by 2025 would increase the global GDP by an estimated 23 per cent.⁸ This type of gender inequality, signaling a violation of women's basic rights, is costly in economic terms. Governments should thus work towards raising awareness of this issue and adopting the appropriate policies to enable women to overcome the time poverty that they suffer from.

B. Goal 1 in the Arab region

In the Arab region, discrimination against women exacerbates their poverty and disempowers them.



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Access to resources is a main challenge. An analysis of data on the financing practices of the region's banks revealed that businesses owned by women represented less than 10 per cent of bank loan portfolios.⁹ Women's labour force participation, standing at 27 per cent in the region, is the lowest in the world, compared with 65 per cent in countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).¹⁰

The political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights of women are indivisible and interdependent; however, the violation of specific rights has a direct detrimental effect on women's wealth and access to resources. In the Arab region, inheritance laws and deep-seated cultural norms constitute an infringement of some of these rights. Illiteracy and child marriage are still major problems in a number of countries, especially in rural areas. Child marriage reduces girls' education opportunities, limits their life choices and exposes them to maternal mortality and violence. In the Arab region, in the period 2000-2015, 15 per cent of women aged 20-24 years were married by age 18.¹¹

Additional problems exacerbating women's poverty in the region, as identified in the Arab Regional Synthesis Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action Twenty Years Later, included "barriers to service access for rural and poor women; lack of health insurance for women in countries seriously affected

by poverty... armed conflicts... and the tendency to undervalue women, their household duties and work done by them outside the home".¹²

In sum, achieving Goal 1 in the Arab region would require focusing on targets 1.3 and 1.4, namely adopting social protection systems that cover all, especially the poor and vulnerable, and ensuring access to economic resources and basic services, ownership and control over assets and natural resources, and technology and financial services. Adapting Goal 1 to the regional context would also entail raising awareness about norms and traditional practices that discriminate against women; reforming inheritance laws to grant women equal access to resources; and combating illiteracy and child marriage.

Goal 2. End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture

A. Missing gender dimensions in Goal 2

Goal 2, specifically mentions vulnerable population groups, including the poor, infants, children, adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons (box 2).

Box 2. Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

- 2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.
- 2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.
- 2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.
- 2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.
- 2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.



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Three vehicles of implementation are identified in the Agenda for the fulfillment of Goal 2: increased investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and technology development; correction and prevention of trade restrictions and distortions in global markets; and adoption of measures to limit food price volatility.

While women produce half of the world's food, and up to 80 per cent of it in most developing countries, 7 out of 10 of the world's hungry are women and girls.¹³ Goal 2 addresses that gender dimension of hunger when referring to equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge and financial services.

Studies show that if women had the same access as men to land, seeds and fertilizers, agricultural productivity would increase by 20 per cent.¹⁴ The below table shows their disadvantaged position in terms of operating agricultural holdings in selected Arab countries.

In addition to impeded access to resources, women suffer from a limited voice in planning and decision-making in the area of farm management, especially in the Arab region. However, Goal 2 does not tackle this obstacle.

To "double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers" as per target 2.3, women

Table. Agriculture Holdings Operated by Civil Persons

Countries	Census year	Total (units)	Headed by a man (units)	Headed by a woman (units)	Male shares (%)	Female shares (%)
Algeria	2001	1,023,799	982,006	41,793	95.92	4.08
Egypt	2000	4,537,319	4,300,687	236,632	94.78	5.22
Morocco	1996	1,492,844	1,426,449	66,395	95.55	4.45
Jordan	1997	91,585	88,873	2,712	97.04	2.96
Lebanon	1998	194,264	180,479	13,785	92.9	7.10
Saudi Arabia	1999	242,267	240,399	1,868	99.23	0.77
Tunisia	2005	516,000	483,020	32,980	93.61	6.39

Source: Mohamed Aw-Dahir, "Food security and sustainable agriculture in the Arab region", FAO Issues Brief for the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2015. Available from <http://css.escwa.org.lb/SDPD/3572/Goal2.pdf>.



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should be target beneficiaries of capacity-building activities, as they perform the largest proportion of agricultural work. Therefore, the capacity-building component targeting women in Goal 2 should be strengthened. Goal 2 also disregards the importance of household dynamics: in many countries, women and girls eat last and least. The outcome is higher rates of malnutrition and anemia among women and girls in comparison with men and boys from the same families.¹⁵

B. Goal 2 in the Arab region

Despite volatile commodity prices, higher food and energy prices, rising unemployment and the economic recessions of the 1990s and 2008, there was progress in reducing hunger at the global level. The story is different in the Arab region, where lower levels of food insecurity have not improved the undernourishment situation: United Nations projections indicate that the prevalence of undernourishment has risen by 32 per cent between 1990-1992 and 2014-2016 in Western Asia due to war, civil unrest and a growing number of refugees.¹⁶ Women and girls make up a large proportion of the refugee population and

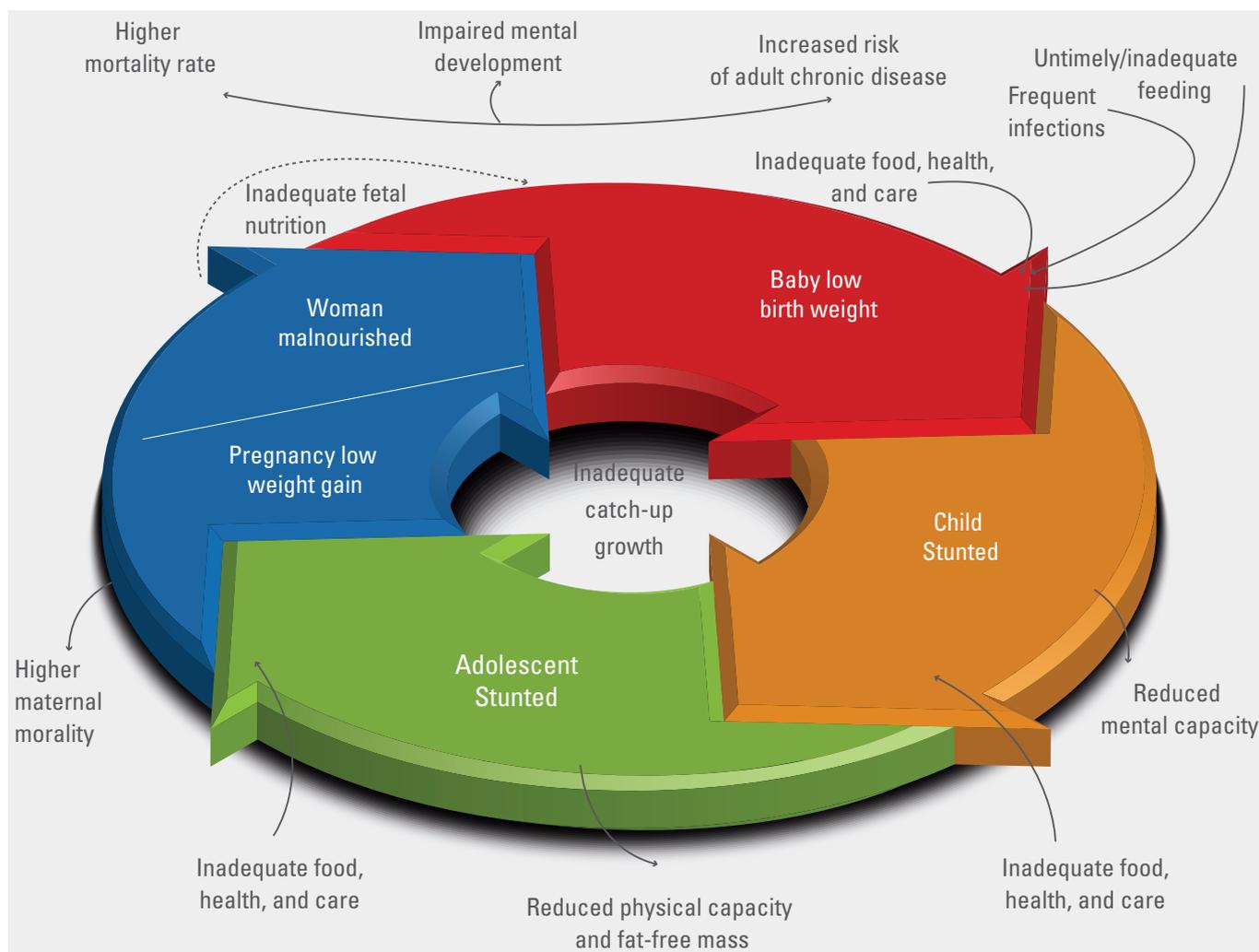
suffer particularly from undernourishment, especially when they are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Ending hunger and malnourishment in the Arab region requires the implementation of food assistance programmes that target refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). At least 4.4 million people in Iraq continued to be in need of food assistance in 2015,¹⁷ and many of the impoverished areas in which IDPs have settled were already struggling with limited resources and lacking basic foodstuffs.¹⁸ The situation is as critical for Syrian refugees: a 2015 assessment of their socioeconomic situation in Lebanon, for example, showed that 70 per cent could not meet their minimum daily food requirements, and 29 per cent were in dire need of help to meet their minimum survival needs.¹⁹

In sum, conflict and displacement are undermining food security and contributing to the rise in hunger in the Arab region. This has serious negative repercussions on maternal health and on the well-being of future generations. The below diagram shows the effects of hunger and malnutrition on women from a life cycle point of view:



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Source: Prepared by Nina Seres for the Sub-Committee on Nutrition of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination. Available from <http://www.unscn.org/layout/modules/resources/files/rwns4.pdf>.

The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) has proposed to monitor progress towards Goal 2 and its targets through measuring the prevalence of undernourishment, stunting and malnutrition. A study of children's health in 18 Arab countries indicated that rates of stunting were higher for male than for female children, which could be attributed to "biologically higher susceptibility of boys to diseases such as diarrhea and acute respiratory infection, and their consequent failure to thrive"²⁰ The same study found that in Jordan, the Sudan and Tunisia, rates of wasting were higher for females. These findings are insufficient to draw conclusions and formulate adequate health and nutrition policies, and more research is needed in this area. The relation between gender discrimination and food security in the Arab region should also be further examined.

Finally, increasing women's access to resources, knowledge, financial and other services, markets and employment

opportunities, as called for in Goal 2, is key for ending hunger in the region. It should however be coupled with efforts to empower women in farm and land management and build their capacity so that they increase their daily food production. Special attention should be given to women refugees and IDPs in the Arab region.

Policy Recommendations

In addition to the targets included in Goal 1 in the 2030 Agenda, achieving this Goal in Arab countries would require the formulation of policies aimed at:

- Reforming inheritance laws to grant women equal rights to resources;
- Combating illiteracy, especially in rural areas;
- Eradicating child marriage through the enactment

- of legislation and establishment of enforcement mechanisms;
- d. Raising awareness on the discriminative cultural norms and practices, and countering extremist religious discourse.

In addition, specifically addressing women's time poverty would necessitate:

- e. Carrying out time use surveys;
- f. Raising awareness on the importance of economic empowerment of women and the equal sharing of household responsibilities between men and women;
- g. Abolishing the legal and structural barriers to women's employment, for example through the amendment of discriminatory labour laws and the establishment of safe and reliable transportation networks, especially in rural areas.

In addition to the targets included in Goal 2 in the 2030 Agenda, achieving this Goal in Arab countries would require focusing on the adoption of the following measures:

- a. Devoting special care to displaced and refugee women;
- b. Increasing women's access to land, other productive resources, inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and employment opportunities;
- c. Empowering women and giving them a voice in farm management;
- d. Building the capacity of women farmers so that they are able to double the productivity of their farms;
- e. Raising awareness on unfair practices and household dynamics that may negatively affect women's and girls' nutrition;
- f. Undertaking research on the relation between gender discrimination and food security in the Arab region.

Finally, civil society should play a role in monitoring the States' actions, building the legal, economic and social capacity of women and raising awareness on discriminative norms and traditions.

Endnotes

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