

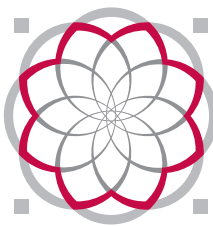
Implementation of the

# 2030 AGENDA:

opportunities and challenges

in JORDAN

Phenix Center for  
Economic and Informatics Studies



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Arab NGO Network for Development  
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية

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## INTRODUCTION

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, though it has successfully maintained a modicum of social and political stability in a region, is still experiencing the turbulent effects of the Arab Spring and has struggled, over the past years, to meet its own developmental aspirations and address its most pressing socioeconomic concerns. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and, more recently, with the aggravation of the Syrian refugee crisis, Jordan, already a resource-starved country, has had to face a number of serious challenges in ensuring, at the same time, economic prosperity, social justice and wellbeing, and political cohesion. Addressing these obstacles has required a process of constant reassessment and redevelopment of Jordan's strategies, policies, and priorities, which has both led to a lack of continuity, and to inconsistencies in the country's response to its socioeconomic ailments – a disharmony which, in turn, has only been aggravated by the successive reshuffling of governmental cabinets<sup>1</sup> (between 2007 and 2016 alone, 7 different prime ministers were appointed).

In 2004, Jordan's commitment to sustainable development was expressed in the form of the first national report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015, introduced by the United Nations at the 2000 Millennium Summit. The report had a sizeable impact on policymaking and efforts were made to integrate the eight goals, with their respective targets and indicators, into Jordan's developmental strategy. Yet, despite this commitment, Jordan's progress in achieving the MDGs was modest at best. In particular, very little was achieved in those areas which called for structural change, and those goals which required harmony between policies and continuity and sustainability in funding. As such, the eradication of poverty and hunger, the achievement of universal basic education, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, the reduction of child mortality, the improvement maternal care, and the realization of environmental sustainability remain among Jordan's developmental priorities, with momentous challenges yet to be addressed.

In 2015, the year in which the MDGs were set to expire, the United Nations adopted a new resolution, regarding the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which

set forth a new list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. The new development agenda enshrined in the SDGs was to serve as successor to the expired MDGs, and it vastly expanded upon the 8 original Millennium Goals, to include a number of heretofore unmentioned developmental challenges. Among these were: The eradication of poverty in all its forms (Goal 1); the promotion of sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and decent employment for all (Goal 8); and the reduction of inequality within and among countries (Goal 10). In the case of Jordan, this corrected critical omissions in the country's developmental vision, as they relate to three of what are arguably the most urgent issues to be addressed in order to promote sustainable development in the Kingdom, and protect the socioeconomic human rights of its citizens: Poverty, inequality, and decent work.

In 2015, a new document was released in Jordan, entitled "Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy." In it, the Government put forth a detailed list of developmental goals, and the measures to be adopted in achieving them. Because it was issued prior to Jordan's endorsement of SDGs, the latter are not explicitly referenced in the text. However, several of the goals listed are in line with the vision championed in the SDGs, meaning the document is certainly representative of Jordan's continued commitment to the improvement of socioeconomic conditions within its borders.

This paper, which has been developed as part of a region-wide initiative, will provide an overview of sustainable development in Jordan, from an SGD-guided perspective – that is, taking into consideration the targets envisaged in the international sustainable development agenda and their respective indicators. In light of the nature and focus of the broader regional initiative, which was established in the course of deliberations conducted with and between a wide variety of experts, three SDGs in particular will constitute the object of this study: SDG 1, pertaining to the eradication of poverty; SDG 8, regarding inclusive economic growth and decent work; and SDG 10, regarding inequality.

The paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will provide an overview of Jordan's social, political, and economic context, accounting for both endogenous and exogenous factors. In other words, it will present a blueprint, as it were, of Jordan's legal and political framework, its socioeconomic ailments, its regional disparities, and its main actors,

<sup>1</sup> Between 2007 and 2016 alone, 7 different prime ministers were appointed.

in the context of the MENA region's instability, the wars in Syria and Iraq, the refugee crisis, and the like. The second section will delve into Jordan's commitment to the 2030 developmental agenda and how that latter has reflected on national strategies. Finally, a third section will provide an assessment of the strategies in place, and their shortcomings, in view of the challenges the country faces in pursuit of the three core areas under scrutiny, viz., poverty, decent work, and inequality. This section will also discuss the changes that need to be made, on the side of policymakers as well as donors, lenders, civil society, and actors in the private sector, in order to create an operating environment more favorable to the attainment of SDGs in Jordan, while looking into the importance of effective program and policy implementation mechanisms. The paper will conclude with a section aimed at summarizing its key findings, to be complemented by a comprehensive list of specific recommendations.

### JORDAN'S SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

Over the past years, Jordan has grown increasingly dependent on foreign grants and loans, which presently account for roughly one-third of public expenditures. Since 1989, the country has struggled to withstand successive economic shocks and crises, and has had to rely on international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to meet its budgetary needs. Commonly, securing IMF loans in particular has required agreeing to certain 'conditionalities', namely in the form of structural adjustment programs, which has hindered the freedom of policymakers to draft and implement legislation unimpeded. In return for much-needed loans, Jordan has been compelled to agree to such measures as the privatization of state-owned companies; the reduction and outright elimination of subsidies; public sector cuts, including the freezing of salaries and the reduction of public sector employment; and such reforms as aimed at favoring large, often foreign businesses and corporations, which have included the implementation of lenient wage policies and flexible employment mechanisms (namely, the facilitation of layoffs).

The conditions imposed by lenders, in line with the World Trade Organization's (WTO) push for ever broader trade liberalization, have also included placing greater stress on the importation of products

in detriment of national production – a measure which has led to the near-obliteration of Jordan's industrial sector. In parallel with the atrophy of the national production of exportable goods, the services sector has flourished, and with it, informality in employment has skyrocketed. Recent figures have shown that, in 2015, an estimated 81% of the national workforce was engaged in the services sector<sup>2</sup>, which in Jordan is highly fragmentary – by which is meant that the majority of enterprises operate in the informal economy. In terms of workers' rights and livelihoods, this has had an enormous impact, not only because, in the absence of a written contract, employees enjoy very little, if any, job security, commonly earn below-minimum wages, and are kept out of the reach of existing social protection mechanisms, but also because informality of employment and the disunity of the services sector make unionization effectively impossible, thus rendering workers unable to secure better working and living conditions through collective bargaining. All the while, the public sector, which is a core provider of formal employment, and commonly offers better pay, as well as such benefits as annual, maternity, and sick leaves, and social security, has shrunk as a result of public sector cuts. Furthermore, on the issue of public for public sector jobs, workers have reported unfair recruitment processes, with personal connections (wasta) often playing a bigger part than actual skills and experience in securing employment.

In addition to the business-friendly policies recommended by the lending IFIs, large businesses and corporations themselves, represented in the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, regularly exert their economic and political influence on policymakers, to their benefit. Conversely, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Jordan are largely denied a say in policymaking. Much like the national independent labor movement, they are excluded from the political processes of consultation and social dialogue, with employers' organizations almost exclusively representing big businesses, while keeping smaller enterprises from voting on or integrating the governing bodies of the two Chambers.

To provide an illustrative example of the sway big businesses hold over the decision-making processes in Jordan, it is pertinent to point out how in 2016, after continuous pressure from workers' organizations, the Jordanian Government finally made the decision to increase the minimum wage, which has stood at

<sup>2</sup> Arab Monetary Fund, "Unified Arab Economic Report", 2015

a meager 268 US\$/month since 2012. Following pressure from the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Government dropped the measure. Regional instability and the growing security concerns have also led to the allocation of larger sums to military and security spending, which, coupled with austerity, has contributed to a decrease in the quality and availability of such public services as healthcare, education, and social protection. Adding to this, the refugee crisis, the constant influx of migrant workers, and the country's high fertility rate have all contributed to the straining of public services and infrastructure. Namely, the reach and quality of Jordan's social security system have remained slim, covering only 1.2 million workers – no more than two-thirds of workers in the formal sector. As for the informal sector, where workers are seldom covered by any type of insurance or social protection whatsoever, as recently as 2012 it was believed to employ 44% of the country's total (formal and informal) workforce<sup>3</sup>. This lack of social protection assistance and coverage is particularly relevant since, as of 2010 (the most recent year for which comprehensive data is available), 14% of the population was living below the poverty line<sup>4</sup>. Finally, also critical is the proximity of minimum wage incomes (268 US\$/month) to absolute poverty threshold earnings, which round 565 US\$/month for an average-sized family. Currently, average wages in Jordan round 650 US\$/month. Recent figures suggest that 52% of Jordanians earn 565 US\$/month or less, and 72% earn 706 US\$/month or less<sup>5</sup>.

Over the past years, Jordan's job-creating capabilities have sharply declined. Whereas circa 2007/2008 the Jordanian economy was capable of creating 70,000 new jobs yearly, by the end of 2015 this figure had dropped to 48,000<sup>6</sup>. These figures are all the more cause for concern when considering, on the one hand, that the national labor market should be able to accommodate for the entry of an additional 100,000 to 120,000 people into the workforce yearly<sup>7</sup>, and, on the other, that Jordanians are now competing for job opportunities with hundreds of thousands

3 Department of Statistics, "The Informal Sector in Jordan:", 2012

4 "Jordan 2015: A National Vision and Strategy", 2015

5 Social Security Corporation, "2015 Annual Report", 2016

6 Jordanian Department of Statistics, "Yearly report 2015", 2016, available at: [http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos\\_home\\_a/main/archive/job\\_creation/2016/Yearly\\_2015.pdf](http://www.dos.gov.jo/dos_home_a/main/archive/job_creation/2016/Yearly_2015.pdf)

7 International Labour Organization (ILO), "Annual Report on World Employment", 2015

of migrant and refugee workers who are willing to work longer hours, and for lower wages and fewer benefits, leading to a deterioration on in working conditions throughout the country, and posing serious challenges to the achievement of SDG 8 (pertaining to decent work) in Jordan.

Additionally, the refugee crisis has caused a spike in child labor in Jordan. Out of necessity, several families are unable to provide their children with an education, instead requiring them to contribute to the family income. In addition to commonly working long hours (10-12 a day) for meager wages (70-112 US\$ per month), working children are often vulnerable and subject to physical and emotional abuse. In Jordan, recent estimates suggest that the number of child laborers (under the age of 16) could be as high as 100,000<sup>8</sup>.

As workers face challenging conditions in the national labor market, the social and political environment in Jordan has hindered their ability to exercise their constitutional rights to freedom of association and assembly to improve their working and living conditions. Both the Jordanian Constitution and Labor Code contain clear provisions protecting workers' right to organize: Article 23 (f) of the 2011 amended Constitution states that free trade unions may be formed within the limits of the law, and the Labor Code clearly states that membership to a trade union shall not limit a worker's access to employment. In addition, freedom of association is supported by Art. 128, which states: "The laws issued by virtue of this Constitution to regulate the rights and freedoms shall not impair the substance of these rights or affect their fundamentals." Moreover, in regards to international standards, Jordan has, to date, ratified seven out of the eight fundamental Conventions which constitute the foundation of International Labor Organization's Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The Declaration, which enshrines the principles of "freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labor, the abolition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation," is at the core of the international standards on labor rights.

In Jordan, since 2006, when they were published in the National Gazette, the ratified Conventions have been an integral part of the national legislative

8 Phenix Center, "Child Labor in Jordan: Reality overrides policy", 2016

framework, despite being constantly violated within the current system. A noteworthy shortcoming of the Jordanian government has been the failure to ratify the ILO Convention No. 87, pertaining to Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize – an omission which is telling of Jordan’s reluctance to fully recognize the rights of all workers to form trade unions and conduct collective bargaining.

Since 1976, there have existed only 17 recognized trade unions in the Kingdom, operating under the umbrella of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), which holds authority over each of the unions’ bylaws and internal affairs. In turn, the GFJTU is strongly associated with the government, and as such does not stray far from the official stance on most issues. Both the GFJTU and each of the official unions are perceived to function undemocratically, with the GFJTU having gone the last 25 years without holding elections. Moreover, official unions do not represent workers in the public sector, seeing as the Civil Servants bylaw includes no provisions regarding the unionization of public sector, in spite of a 2013 decision by the Constitutional Court recognizing the right of civil servants to freedom of association. Also in this regard, and against the same principles of independent association, a governmental law issued in 2014 dictated that, if ever formed, public sector unions would be placed under governmental jurisdiction.

Since its inception in 2011, the Jordanian independent labor movement has faced serious challenges. The Jordanian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (JFITU) is the GFJTU’s unofficial, unrecognized, independent counterpart. Due to its status, it is not allowed to open headquarters, collect membership fees, or conduct collective bargaining. It is run entirely by volunteers and is under constant pressure from the government to disband. Other independent unions exist which are not affiliated with the JFITU, though they too have encountered similar obstacles. The government’s control over the GFJTU and its general distaste for the independent labor movement is an artifact of the process of political centralization which has been underway in Jordan. In fact, some observers have gone so far as to state that the country’s political dynamics have become increasingly similar to those of an absolute monarchy. Simultaneously, the Kingdom is suffering from lack of political transparency, as well as high

levels of official corruption<sup>9</sup> and tax evasion<sup>10</sup>, which have a significant impact on the national balance of payments. Because of this, in addition to the abovementioned factors, Jordan continues to rely heavily on foreign loans – a dependence which leaves policymakers little choice other than to adhere to the developmental models imposed by such IFIs as the IMF. Naturally, the country’s reliance on borrowing has brought about unprecedented levels of public debt, which have reached 95% of GDP.

### THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS FOR 2030 AND THEIR INTEGRATION INTO THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

Jordan’s 2025 developmental vision denotes an understanding of the challenges it faces and, on certain issues, is in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030. However, meeting these challenges will require a level of participation, cooperation, and inclusiveness which has hitherto not been made possible by the country’s political, economic, and social framework. In this regard, the swearing in of a new government in May 2016, together with the entry into office of a new Lower House (Parliament), in September, represents a momentous opportunity for reform, and for the reassessment and redevelopment of the national approach to development.

The government of Jordan has stated that it would integrate all 17 SDGs, along with the respective 169 goals and 231 performance indicators, into its national vision, according to the country’s priorities and capabilities – naturally with the exception of the targets which do not concern the country, such as those pertaining to the protection of specific forms of wildlife which do not exist in Jordan. So far, the Jordanian Government has begun to discuss all goals and indicators with official bodies and civil society organizations and has expressed its intention to submit a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the United Nations in July 2017, presenting a report on implementation and achievements.

According to official sources, the government’s approach to SDGs will revolve around four fundamental priorities: To develop an SGD-oriented ‘roadmap’

<sup>9</sup> Mohammed Mossallem, “The IMF in the Arab world: Lessons unlearned”, London: Bretton Woods Project, 2015, p.10

<sup>10</sup> According to Government estimates, tax evasion drains state coffers of 1,127 million US\$ annually.

for the integration of the 2030 Developmental Agenda and its indicators into the several sectoral strategies, namely through consultations with civil society (priority 1); to increase the awareness of civil society in regards to SDGs (priority 2); to increase the capacity of CSOs, along with governmental bodies and staff, to implement and assess SDG-related programs and strategies (priority 3); and to develop a national monitoring system dedicated to overseeing the pursuit of SDG targets, based on the 2030 Agenda's 231 indicators, in addition to the 580 country-specific indicators which have been developed in Jordan over the past years (priority 4). Among the ideas currently being discussed by officials, with no assurances as of yet regarding their implementation, there is the conduction of statistical research per each governorate, according to SDG and national indicators; the creation of a national team, composed of government, private sector, and CSO representatives, to follow up on SDG-related activities; and the creation of small working groups dedicated to broad groups of SDGs, building on a previously conducted workshop. Currently, the development of a national document is underway which will integrate SDG indicators into all sectoral strategies. One notable obstacle which has been remarked upon is the absence of concrete indicators for SDGs 10 and 16. There have also been talks of creating a national team dedicated to these goals. In terms of specific SDG targets, the abovementioned national strategy for 2025, entitled "Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy", while emphasizing some of Jordan's key socioeconomic challenges, fail to address some of the Sustainable Development targets which also present sizeable obstacles in the country. In regards to SDG 1, pertaining to the eradication of poverty "in all its forms", two subsections of the document (1.2.4 and 1.2.5) are particularly relevant, as they concern "poverty and disadvantaged communities" and "cost of living", respectively. Section 1.2.4 begins by introducing the somewhat dubious assertion that "Jordan has developed a wide-reaching and robust social safety"<sup>11</sup>, which, the document continues, has made it possible to make significant progress in "reducing poverty and creating a more equal society". On the topic of equality, which concerns SDG 10, pertaining to the reduction of inequality "within and among countries", the document points out that average poverty levels rise substantially when the Amman, Irbid and Zarqa governorates are excluded, and

that tackling regional disparities should therefore be viewed as a priority. In the following subsection, however, the country's gains in tackling poverty and inequality are described as "fragile", and it is underlined that current levels of social spending are unsustainable, in view of the refugee crisis and projected population growth, and that social support systems must be redeveloped in order to better target those "who are genuinely in need"<sup>12</sup>.

Sections 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 concern participation in the workforce and employment, respectively, thus concerning SDG 8, which pertains to inclusive economic growth, employment, and decent work, directly. Section 1.1.4 begins by stating that "the current development model is unable to encourage young population to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the national economy"<sup>13</sup>, making no mention of a possible scarcity of opportunities until it is mentioned that Jordan's extremely high inactivity rates, particularly among females, shed light on the fact that the "current development model is clearly not creating the number and quality of jobs demanded by our citizens", though, it continues, "our citizens must be willing to take on the jobs that are available in our country"<sup>14</sup>. In regards to gender equality, the document stresses the employment and wage disparity between genders, which is more prevalent and severe than in such comparable countries as Algeria, Morocco, Egypt and Mauritania. Boosting female labor market participation from 15% to 27% by 2025, the document continues, would have "major positive impacts on economic growth in Jordan, by at least 5% by 2025"<sup>15</sup>.

Regarding the promotion of employment, Jordan 2025 highlights some of the key challenges to be addressed: The number of foreign workers in the country, which is related to the blooming "culture of shame" dissuading Jordanians from engaging in certain types of occupations perceived to be dishonorable; informality of employment among migrant workers; supply-demand disharmony in the labor market; social attitudes towards employment in such fields as vocational and technical professions; and the prevalence of *wasta*. No mention is made of the challenges faced by the labor movement or the state of freedom of association in the country.

In pursuing the SDGs specifically, officials have pointed out a number of obstacles. For one, the

11 "Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy" (henceforth abbreviated Jordan 2025), p.31

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid, p.27

14 Ibid.

15 Idem, p.28

national Department of Statistics is limited in regards to the 231 SDG indicators, of which it covers only 71. In addition to these 71 absent indicators, there is no data available for another 80, and yet another 80 figures can only be estimated by means of indirect data. Though there have been thoughts of redeveloping the national statistical system to meet the requirements of the Sustainable Development Agenda, no concrete plan has yet been developed. Additionally, the cost of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals remains to be calculated, which makes it difficult to assess, at present, the extent of the government's ability to pursue the 2030 Agenda.

In regards to its potential partners in development, the government has accused private sector employers of tax evasion, non-compliance with minimum wage policies, and mistreatment of female employees (something which civil society has also often pointed out), and civil society of being overly critical, as opposed to acting as a partner in developing solutions to the challenges of female employment in the country. In regards to the need for lasting changes to be operated within the socio-cultural paradigm, which is at the source of many of the more momentous obstacles to the integration of women into the Jordanian labor market, the government largely seems to have surrendered to a perceived inevitability of the status quo, in that it has hardly contested or sought to counteract Jordanians' views on gender roles and the division of labor according to gender (Phenix Center, 2016).

The abovementioned unwillingness to commit to undertake structural changes has limited the government to the employment of ad hoc solutions to the country's socioeconomic ailments. Government action has thus been rooted on largely unfruitful policy-drawing, which, in addition, has lacked adequate oversight and follow-up in its implementation. Because of this, little has been achieved in regards to those developmental targets which require structural change. Coupled with a chronic mismanagement of national resources (SDG 12), lack of encouragement of citizen participation, and poor government transparency and accountability (SDG 16) – which have, in turn, led to a rise in popular mistrust in government – this failure to pursue long-lasting change through the structural reassessment of the country's political and administrative framework has arguably been the main vulnerability of Jordan's developmental aspirations.

In regards to civil society, several obstacles remain which hinder its ability to become an effective partner

in development. One such obstacle is the national 2008 Associations Law, and its 2009 amendments, which ban the creation of any groups with “political goals”, or whose activities are perceived to threaten public order. In 2016, proposed amendments to the law sought to make it more restrictive still, by prohibiting the formation of any group that threatens “national security, public safety, public health, public order, public morals, or the rights and freedoms of others”. Furthermore, proposed amendments would increase the required number of founding members from 7 to 50, making it extremely difficult for small and community-based organizations to obtain official status.

Another obstacle has been the pervasive lack of capacity among civil society actors. Many Jordanian citizens lack an adequate understanding of the country's political and social framework, the devices which are at their disposal to make their voices heard and seek assistance, and SDGs, and poor interpersonal and communication skills are common in all social sectors and strata. Though CSOs commonly strive towards goals which are in line with the 2030 Developmental Agenda, most do so unknowingly. Civil society in Jordan is largely fragmentary and, accordingly, CSOs often act individually, and within relatively limited scopes. Similarly, the media reports on issues which concern SDGs, but hardly, if ever, mention the 2030 Goals explicitly. In spite of the awareness-raising efforts carried out by UN agencies and a small number of other institutions, civil society and the general public remain largely unaware of the Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, on the technical side, there is an overall want of a better understanding of socioeconomic and political rights and of the ways of advocate for their protection and advancement, as well as of more efficient organizational capabilities.

Nevertheless, the commitment of Jordanian civil society to the goals and principles of the 2030 Developmental Agenda have been made clear through a number of initiatives, of which the most momentous has arguably been the creation of a CSO coalition named Jordan Forum for SDGs 2030. Coalition members – approximately 200 CSOs from different sectors and areas of focus – are currently developing an organizational framework and implementing an internal capacity-building program. In the future, civil society partners hope that the Forum will serve as a platform through which CSOs may contribute to the achievement of SDGs in Jordan.

## THE WAY FORWARD AND THE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE PRESENT

Since the inception of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, there has been some proof of the Jordanian government's commitment towards their achievement. Alas, no programs have yet entered the implementation phase, and all efforts undertaken thus far have been fundamentally theoretical and preparatory, rooted in policy-drawing and strategy development, and are yet to materialize into concrete measures. While the national Department of Statistics commonly draws the conclusions necessary for policy-drawing, the Ministry of Planning is responsible for developing such policies and overseeing their implementation. Yet, as 2016 draws to a close, the Government shows no intention of expressly integrating SDGs into their national strategy, denoting a certain unawareness of the importance of integrating the international push towards human rights promotion into the national developmental agenda. Furthermore, the sum of public money allocated to combatting poverty (SDG 1) in the country has been nearly halved, dropping from 123 million US\$ annually to only 62 million<sup>16</sup>.

In terms of employment, several challenges remain, as evidenced by the recent hike in the percentage of unemployed males (which was shown to have risen by 2.1% between the fourth quarters of 2015 and 2016, to 1.8% among females)<sup>17</sup>. Commonly, the government seeks to justify its shortcomings regarding such social indicators by pointing to the socioeconomic pressures currently ailing the Kingdom, such as the high numbers of unlicensed migrant workers and the Syrian refugee crisis, and even by referring to the national cultural framework as being impeditive of the achievement of certain targets, namely regarding employment. Conversely, the blatant nature of such shortcomings not only constitutes an opportunity for, but effectively demands a reevaluation of the national developmental strategy.

The recent parliamentary elections and the appointment of a new government present an opportunity to change the country's approach to the challenges it faces in achieving SDGs. In particular, it represents a chance to halt the unrelenting process of political and administrative centralization which

Jordan has witnessed with increased intensity over the past years. On this note, in addressing the Lower House of Parliament on November 16 2016, Prime Minister Hani Mulki expressed his government's wishes to boost popular participation in development efforts and to undertake a process of decentralization<sup>18</sup>. However, the emphasis was placed on municipal and governorate autonomy, and civil society remains largely disregarded as a partner in development, even though civil society and community-based organizations are among the actors most concerned with achieving SDGs in Jordan.

The government's lack of dialogue with social society is one of the main sources of the country's chronic strategic dissonance in the pursuit of sustainable development. In other words, the absence of formal cooperation between the central and local administrations, on the one hand, and civil society, on the other, is impeditive of the achievement of what the United Nations has termed the "single approach," which encapsulates the need for developing a unified strategy founded on the principles of cooperation, and stressing the undertaking of concerted efforts for the achievement of developmental targets.

Recently, UN bodies in Jordan have striven to cooperate with the new government towards redeveloping the UN Strategic Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF) in a way that better addresses the country's priorities in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals. While cooperating and interacting with both government and civil society actors, the UN has thus helped to bridge the gap created by effort disharmony in Jordan, and make possible the adoption of a unified, comprehensive strategy to tackle the country's socioeconomic challenges. Likewise, in April 2015, the National Forum on Jordanian Sustainable Development was launched, through which CSO representatives expressed their commitment to strengthening cooperation ties amongst each other and with the government.

However, as mentioned above, CSOs in Jordan suffer from a lack of institutional capacity, in addition to being dependent on foreign funds and subject to a broad array of legal restrictions. To address these fragilities, the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, an Amman-based NGO, has

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Planning, "Executive Developmental Program", 2013-2016

<sup>17</sup> Labor Watch, "Unemployment rates high during the fourth quarter of 2016" [Source: Department of Statistics]. Available at: <http://www.labor-watch.net/en/read-news/1850>

<sup>18</sup> "Government presents policy statement to Lower House", Jordan Times, 17 November 2016



launched a broad training program reaching over 40 local CSOs, with course subjects ranging from institutional development, human rights, advocacy, and SGDs. Through this initiative, the Center has sought to empower civil society to become a stronger partner in sustainable development, though this will require government action towards creating an effectively enabling environment for CSOs to operate. Yet, little in the “vision and strategy” launched for the next 10 years is cause for optimism regarding the government’s position towards civil society, as it continues to emphasize the central role of government in promoting living and working conditions in the country and still fails to account for the need for broader dialogue and cooperation between the several social, economic, and political actors in the country. In order for tangible sustainable development in Jordan to be achieved, the stage must be set for overarching cooperation between government, parliament, civil society actors, and the private sector.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Against the backdrop of regional instability, security concerns, the Syrian refugee crisis, and unbridled migration, among other factors, Jordan has struggled, over the past years, to implement a long term, cohesive, result-producing strategy to achieve its developmental priorities. Although some progress was made in regards to MDGs, numerous key challenges remain to be addressed, namely pertaining to poverty levels, low wages, informality of employment, a social security system with limited reach, gender disparities, and freedom of association. In fact, most of these challenges are likely to remain unaddressed if the national administration opts to preserve the current social, economic, and political paradigm to the detriment of real, profound change. Moreover, the SDGs themselves are yet to be explicitly integrated into the national approach to development. In other words, a comprehensive reassessment of the country’s problems and the most effective strategies in addressing them must be undertaken, under pain of repeating past mistakes and preserving an ineffective framework.

Under the current model, Jordan is severely underutilizing its potential social capital, which is arguably the greatest challenge to the achievement of SDGs in Jordan. Civil society, which has been the main actor striving for the promotion of socioeconomic human rights in the country – which play a fundamental part in ensuring sustainable

development – suffers from a chronic lack of capacity and has been repeatedly denied a voice and a role in the development of strategies geared towards facing such challenges as the gender gap, poverty, unemployment, and the promotion of international labor standards. On the other hand, there are little to no incentives in place to make the private sector a partner in development; in fact, the strategy of prioritizing the competitiveness of the Jordanian economy in detriment of the promotion of decent working conditions, whilst largely ignoring the question of corporate social responsibility, has served to perpetuate and even exacerbate some of the country’s most pressing socioeconomic obstacles. Yet, the political changes currently underway in the Kingdom – the appointment of a new government and the election of a new Lower House – represent a precious opportunity for a change of pace. As the newly-appointed Prime Minister Hani Mulki expressed his government’s desire to favor decentralization, hopes were rekindled that the new administration will be willing and able to create the necessary environment for broad coordination and cooperation between the government, donors, the private sector, and civil society, where the latter would assume a predominant role in working towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. In fact, it could be argued that civil society alone may come to ensure the broadness of scope and reach which the implementation of a sustainable development strategy in Jordan will require.

In light of the conclusions reached in the course of this inquiry, the following recommendations are deemed pertinent:

- Strengthen dialogue with civil society partners, and promote their inclusion in developing and implementing national strategies for the achievement of SDGs;
- Promote awareness of SDGs and intensify national efforts towards the achievement of their targets;
- Integrate SDG targets and performance indicators into all national strategic plans;
- Broaden the reach of the national social security system, to ensure decent minimum living standards for the more vulnerable segments of the population;
- Strengthen cooperation with stakeholders in order to curb effort disharmony and work towards the implementation of a unified strategy on SDGs;
- Create incentives to promote the involvement of private sector actors in the pursuit of sustainable development, namely by ensuring that international standards are respected, and that corporate social responsibility is observed;
- Recognize the new and independent trade union movement and allow its actors to become key partners in social dialogue, and draw provisions for the creation of independent unions in the public sector;
- Increase the minimum wage, to minimize the risk of poverty among the lowest paid;
- Enforce minimum wage policies in the formal as well as the informal economy, to curb the effects of unjust competition posed by refugees and migrant workers;
- Take greater action in promoting the social, political, and economic empowerment of women, namely through incentives to female employment and wage equality, to minimize the gender gap in the labor market;
- Favor procedural and administrative transparency in government, and put mechanisms into place to ensure that the implementation of policies and strategies is more adequately followed up on.

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