

## A Glimpse into the Knowledge Week in Egypt

As the world changes at a faster pace than we can perceive, we are witnessing the increasingly important role played by knowledge in the development of modern-day societies. Investing in knowledge is a key priority for countries that aim to expand their development and economic potential and meet the ambitious goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.

To support countries in this endeavor, the Knowledge Project has launched the “Knowledge Week” initiative that will be organized throughout 2018 in different capitals in the Arab region and beyond. The aim of this initiative is to drive active conversation and raise awareness on the importance of knowledge and knowledge-based policies for sustainable development.

The starting point for these discussions is the Global Knowledge Index (GKI). Launched by the Knowledge Project in 2017, the GKI is the only index that measures knowledge on the global level and provides a snapshot of the status of knowledge in 131 countries, identifying areas of strength and weakness that can inform policy design and debates.

The first Knowledge Week was held in Egypt from 6 to 12 March 2018, and it engaged around 2,100 people among students, professors, and researchers. It started off from the Zewail City of Science and Technology in Cairo, then reached Nile University, and different faculties in Alexandria University.

The discussions revolved around ways to achieve a knowledge society, how to face illiteracy, and how to develop skills and capacities that can match the changing labor market landscape of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Knowledge Project also presented the Global Knowledge Index to the educational institutions, which are pivotal to shaping youth and future generations.

*“The Global Knowledge Index will help Egypt define the positive and negative factors that are impacting Egypt’s position on the World map of knowledge, innovation, and scientific research”* said Dr. Shareef Sadaki, President of Zewail City of Science and Technology.

Egypt ranks 95 out of 131 countries in the Global Knowledge Index, with a total score of 40/100 –below the global average which stands at 47/100. The country scores above global average in the higher education sector, but underperforms particularly in the research, development and innovation sector. The relatively weak general enabling environment is also a factor that negatively impacts Egypt’s total score.

*“People will be measured by their knowledge, as 30% of jobs will not exist by 2030. We have no choice but to develop our academic programs”* noted Dr. Isam Kurdi, President of Alexandria University.

In addition to the sessions with universities, a Knowledge Forum was organized jointly with the Ahram Foundation, one of the key media institutions in Egypt, to discuss the role of media and its



effect on the fourth industrial revolution. After Egypt, next stops of the “Knowledge Week” in 2018 will include Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco and several capitals beyond the Arab States region, such as Paris, London and New York.

## A new regional programme to help Arab States achieve the 2030 Agenda

As we have just entered the third year of the 2030 Agenda, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab States region is challenged by increasing fragility, vulnerability and exclusion. The Arab region is marked by conflict or protracted crisis which persist in seven out of twenty countries, causing destruction and displacement of massive scope. Significant development challenges also continue, characterized by rising poverty, climate change, natural resource insecurity, economic instability, and high unemployment rates. Formulated in response to such complex and interrelated sets of immediate and long-term challenges, the UNDP Regional Programme for Arab States 2018-2021 has been approved by the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board on 23 January 2018. Guided by the 2030 Agenda and the UNDP Strategic Plan, the regional programme is optimized to help countries in the region achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The new Regional Programme is framed around two interrelated outcomes and leverages regional cooperation and policy dialogue to foster sustainable growth that maximizes the potential of young Arab population, and strengthens institutions for more peaceful societies.



While building on past work and achievements, the programme expands and sharpens the focus of its programmatic interventions. A broader approach to governance will scale up the successful work on anti-corruption and integrity with additional engagement of civil society and youth, as well as looking at the larger picture of democratic reforms in the region. Inclusion and participation will be also promoted through the provision of regional electoral assistance, and through the promotion of women’s participation in the political and security spheres.

A regional approach to prevent violent extremism will be introduced to refine preventive responses that limit the cross-border and cross-regional reach of extremist groups. The underlying causes that lead to migration and displacement will be further analyzed and the work on resilience will be scaled up, nurturing regional exchange and promoting multi-country partnerships for targeted interventions.

The new initiatives also include a regional approach to local governance and local development to facilitate the sharing of best practices across the region, as well as a new focus on youth employability to bridge the gap between the labor market and the education sector, fostering entrepreneurship. The regional programme will expand its work on Arab economic integration, deepening its partnership with the League of Arab States and further engaging the private sector. The work on climate resilience will focus on the food-water-energy nexus which is particularly relevant for this region where resources are scarce. The regional programme will also continue to foster thought leadership and promote evidence-based policymaking through research, analysis and data dissemination with a view to working closer with stakeholders to devise actual policy recommendations.

Such knowledge-based, cross-country and regional work will contribute to tangible results on the ground, by strengthening the work with UNDP country offices and by providing new perspectives to national actors. In line with the directions set out in the new Strategic Plan and the Secretary-General's report on the UN Development System, the regional programme will strengthen the partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia and benefit from a stronger collaboration with other UN agencies, building on each other's expertise and sectoral strengths. While presenting the new document before the Executive Board, Mr. Mourad Wahba –UNDP Regional Director for Arab States –concluded by noting that the regional programme 2018-2021 “is one important contribution to the ultimate goals that we all share: inclusive societies that leave no one behind; resilient societies that take risks such as climate change into account; and strong societies that are able to lead the changes needed to meet the promise of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development”.

## Jordan launches the National Single Window to streamline trade flows

As a clear expression of its strong commitment to trade and investment facilitation, Jordan launched the process to establish its National Single Window (Jordan NSW) during a ceremony held on 22 January in Amman. The official launch was attended by high-level officials from relevant line ministries, representatives from the Customs Department and private businesses. The Commissioner of Egypt Customs Authority, Dr. Magdy Abdel Aziz, and a senior representative of the World Customs Organization also took part in the event.



Jordan has stepped into the new generation of national single window that entails the integration of control and administration of various governmental agencies that deal with customs management. To this end, Jordan's National Steering Committee of NSW worked with UNDP to develop the Roadmap for the establishment of its single window, which was adopted in December 2017. His Excellency Omar Malhas, Minister of Finance of Jordan, opened the ceremony by stressing that “***the National Single Window will make customs management more efficient, thereby promoting investment and boosting economic cooperation***”.

The Director of the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States, Dr. Khaled Abdelshafi, expressed high appreciation to the leadership of the Government and determination in achieving better efficiency and competitiveness through modernization of processes, reduction of costs of doing business and adoption of new technology to enhance control while tackling corruption. He also pointed out that the adoption of the roadmap is an important step to further unleash trade's potential to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr. Wadah Al Hamoud, Director General of Jordan Customs, highlighted that the launch of the NSW opens a new era for trade facilitation in Jordan, leading to higher efficiency in the clearance, release and distribution of shipments. He underscored that this will be made possible thanks to Jordan's determination in modernizing and digitalizing its operations and logistics services. The Roadmap of Jordan NSW provides a new policy framework that leverages trade facilitation, e-commerce and e-government to strengthen Jordan's competitiveness thereby benefiting investors,

businesses and Jordanian citizens.

Through its project “Strengthening Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development”, UNDP has worked hand-in-hand with the Government of Jordan to support its endeavors towards the establishment of the NSW in recent years. This support, which included capacity building, provision of technical assistance and consultations with seven governmental agencies, was widely acknowledged both by national authorities and the private sector. Mr. Quang Anh Le, Chief Technical Advisor said that these efforts will continue in 2018 and 2019, noting that work will be undertaken to connect Jordan’s NSW to single windows of other Arab countries to increasingly deepen Arab economic integration.

The senior representative of WCO, Ms Ana Hinojosa, Director of Compliance and Facilitation expressed her appreciation for the progress achieved by Jordan Customs and for UNDP as a development partner in the promotion of trade facilitation. She also emphasized that the NSW is a great opportunity towards a more efficient future, with less duplication, more efficiency, and a significant reduction of costs, thereby making Jordan a more attractive destination for investment. These important efforts benefitted from a strong partnership and generous contribution of the Swedish Government through the Swedish International Development Agency - a key partner to promote better competitiveness, good governance and inclusive growth in Arab countries, and help them achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Hacking the Project Cycle for Impact in Arab States & Africa: #NewUNDP

Fundamental and rapid changes in the development landscape call for a major and urgent rethink of policy priorities, delivery approaches, and financing mechanisms in international development. Governments and other partners are making increasingly sophisticated demands that are challenging the mainstream work of UNDP. As part of its new strategic direction, UNDP is making investments in innovation, including building new skills, attracting new types of partners, and prototyping new organizational forms such as policy labs. This organizational pivot has also led to the development of a new product aimed at embedding innovation throughout our business processes: the “UNDP Project Cycle Hackers Kit,” which consists of 17 tools that cover the project cycle from scanning, planning, implementation to M&E and closure. The primary purpose of the Hackers Kit is to continue advancing innovation as the “new normal” for UNDP, as opposed to an add-on or a practice taking place on the margins of what UNDP does.

In December 2017, the regional innovation team leads in Arab States and Africa hosted a three-day Hackers Workshop for colleagues from 20 countries across the two regions to familiarize them with the Hackers Kit and encourage them to adopt a hacker mentality as they design and implement their programmes and projects.

Prior to the workshop, colleagues met internally and with their national partners to identify programmatic opportunities for innovation and select specific Hackers Kit tools to explore during the workshop. During the workshop, participants had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with all the tools in the Project Cycle Hackers Kit and then spent time “deep diving” into the handful of





tools that they felt could most effectively support their work.

Colleagues from five offices in the region participated in the workshop, bringing with them an array of projects and ideas about which Hackers Kit tools to use. For example, the team in Somalia was interested in using tools to design and implement a social Innovation initiative to empower Internally Displaced People in co-creating solutions for challenges they face in their communities, particularly the “test your assumptions” and “plan your prototype” tools. The team in Egypt wanted to use the “scaling pathways” tool to identify ways of scaling up the Social Innovation Hubs they have launched in partnership with Microsoft and the National Council of Women.

By hacking the project cycle, regardless of where a project is along a project lifecycle, it is hoped that colleagues and national partners can develop projects or initiatives that are more informed and reflective of target citizens’ needs, that can be delivered via stronger partnerships, and that result in more sustainable and sustained impact.

While we are excited about rolling out the toolkit across our regions, we also recognize that culture change is not just achieved through a toolkit or a workshop but by facilitating different types of interactions between management and staff, between staff and partners and clients, as well as by applying new techniques and tools in real-life contexts to address real-life needs. The toolkit delivers structure that can support these new conversations, principles and tools to better manage the clients’ demand, identify citizens’ needs, and come up with fresh solutions to key policy priorities in the region. As part of our initiative, we are also supporting peer-to-peer interactions across countries and regions. Colleagues who participated in the Hackers Workshop have an opportunity to apply for funds that would enable them to access expertise and support from colleagues across the two regions.

We invite you to explore the **Project Cycle Hackers Kit** and a new way of working. Reach out to the regional innovation team and your fellow “hackers” for more information about how they are using the toolkit!

## Volunteerism is bringing change and meaning to lives

In the Arab States in 2017, UNV has mobilized close to 1,000 National and International onsite UN Volunteers in 16 countries, in addition to 412 online UN Volunteers. In Lebanon, 239 UN Volunteers (234 of them being National UN Volunteers) serve in Beirut, Tripoli, Saida, Tyr and Baalbek. They are integrated within UN agencies, ministries, public institutions and UNRWA schools.



Etab Eid, teacher in Saida, says: *“there is something about the word volunteer that I cannot explain, but it implies a feeling of pride. A personal choice that comes from the bottom of your heart. Something you simply want to do. Helping others. (...) I teach my students that life might not be able to give us everything, but we could give everything we have”*

Some of these assignments contribute to the efforts to improve economic recovery, community security and social stability in affected Lebanese communities while some others contribute to providing quality education to Palestine refugees fleeing Syria. Since 2015, more than 100 Palestine refugees serve as UN Volunteers on a yearly basis with UNRWA Lebanon.

In Sudan, 225 UN Volunteers are serving - including in remote, deep field locations - where they embrace challenges of extremely high temperatures, and limited infrastructure to carry out critical functions in UN Agencies, Funds, Programs, and Peace Keeping Missions.

Youth Volunteer Coordinator Chihiro Bise is one of 71 UN Volunteers serving to promote volunteerism as a means to achieve peace and sustainable development. Her work in the UNDP/UNV Youth Volunteers Supporting Peace and Recovery in Darfur project harnesses the energy of young Sudanese volunteers in the rebuilding process of Darfur through enhancing livelihoods and creating work opportunities that would deter them from becoming the fuel of violence and armed conflicts. Other volunteers serving in UNICEF, OCHA, FAO, IFAD, exhibit the same dedication through their UN Volunteer assignments.

Human Rights Officer Adil Ishag is one of 154 volunteers serving across two UN Peace Keeping Missions in Sudan; African Union –United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and UN Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA). He comments, *“I experience a great sense of personal fulfillment as I visit vulnerable groups and help them understand their rights and recourse as citizens of Sudan”*.

In addition to supporting UN Volunteers in their assignments, UNV Field Units based in UNDP and the two Peace Keeping Missions work together to carry out community outreach programs in Sudan to empower vulnerable groups such as females and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Examples include organized workshops on Youth Volunteerism for Clean Environments, Peace Building, and Development, as well as clean-up campaigns.

## Understanding the journey to violent extremism

Violent extremism in Africa caused 33,300 fatalities between 2011 and 2016, reversing hard-won development gains and threatening to stunt prospects for decades to come. Yet, far less is known about the causes, consequences and trajectories informing violent extremism. On 17 January, the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States hosted a presentation of the report “Journey to Extremism in Africa”, which generates improved understanding about the incentives and drivers of violent extremism, as expressed by recruits to the continent’s deadliest groups themselves. The research is part of the UNDP Africa Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) project and, given its coverage of some Arab countries (Somalia, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco), is jointly implemented with the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States.

The report is based on a questionnaire exploring the life histories and personal perspectives on a range of personal, cultural, socio-economic and political issues administered to a sample of more than 700 individuals. These include former recruits from violent extremist groups such as Al-Qaida, ISIL, Boko Haram and Al Shabaab.

The event was opened by Khaled Abdelshafi, Director of UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States,



who stressed that “*security and military measures to fight terrorism are not enough, and need to be complemented by prevention and development efforts to address its root causes. This is where UNDP comes in and this study will provide important evidence for our current and future policy and programming*”.

What makes a person decide to join a violent extremist group? Mohamed Yahya, Regional Programme Coordinator for UNDP Africa presented some interesting findings from the report, which point to a number of factors that can shape the journey.

For instance, the majority of recruits come from peripheral areas that have suffered generations of marginalization, and tend to report less parental involvement in their lives as children. Education and economic conditions are also key factors, as 6% of voluntary recruits have 2 or fewer years of education, and employment is the most frequently cited need at the time of recruit. 50% of voluntary recruits cite religious reasons for joining an extremist group, and over 75% of them place no trust in politicians or in the state security apparatus.

Yet, Africa is not the only region affected by this violent phenomenon. The Arab States region has witnessed the most marked increase in terrorist activity globally over the last 15 years. While most of the territory captured by ISIS has now been retaken by Government authorities in Iraq and Syria, violent extremism continues to be a threat across the region and the return of foreign fighters to source countries is of increasing concern.

To address this challenge, the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States recently launched its own regional PVE project which aims at supporting UNDP Country Offices, national counterparts and civil society actors to address the drivers and consequences of violent extremism in line with the recommendations of the UN Secretary General’s Plan of Action.

## Confronting climate change as an accelerator of crisis

More frequent and severe droughts, millions at risk of famine, the spread of conflict and mass displacement - these are the challenges of our time and have generated the worst humanitarian crisis since the UNs establishment. Climate change has arisen as a key focus of attention in this process, as one of the main drivers of fragility in the world today. This is particularly relevant for the Arab region, where most countries affected by conflict are also hotspots of climate impact.



The Arab region is already the planet’s most water scarce and food import-dependent region, and with temperatures rising faster than the world average, by 2030 food and water productivity could drop a further 20% if trends continue. The entry into force of the Paris Agreement should be seen therefore not just from an ecological perspective, but a key instrument for combatting poverty and social vulnerability. Clearly, failure to achieve its goals through scaled-up climate resilience measures will jeopardize the future achievement of the SDGs. To this end, UNDPs Regional Hub for Arab States has spearheaded a new UN inter-agency platform for climate action in the Arab region.

A partnership between UNDP, UNEP, UNISDR and WFP, a SDG Climate Facility will soon be established as a platform for capacity development, innovation and finance in the region. The Facility would partner with and develop the capacity of the League of Arab States (LAS) and the

Arab Water Council (AWC) to help countries take action on climate change in a way that brings co-benefits across the SDGs –helping develop risk management tools and early warning systems, scale up climate finance, and put in place approaches to address climate risk.

Two regional events were recently convened in this regard. The first was a side event held 14 November at the UN Climate COP23 summit. Through participation of officials from Iraq, Sudan, Egypt and other countries from the region, the role of climate change as a root cause of crisis and displacement was explored, with focus on practical local solutions that could be supported through UN partnership. The second was a partner roundtable held on 27 November hosted by LAS and AWC during the 4th Arab Water Forum. As countries in the region move forward on the implementation this under the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, UNDP's Regional Hub is helping establish a new One-UN platform for climate resilience, for the benefit of our regional and country partners.

## Accelerating Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Development in the Arab region

Building on previous achievements, the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States' (RBAS) organized the third Regional Forum of the **Youth Leadership Programme (YLP 3)**. Within the framework of the *Mosharaka initiative*, this year's theme was "*Accelerating Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Development*" and the aim was to support young Arab women and men in refining innovative solutions for sustainable development challenges in their communities. Through YLP, UNDP recognizes young people as a positive force for transformational change and enables them to build their capacity, engage in sustainable community development, and become social innovators and leaders who effectively advocate for gender equality. The Youth Leadership Programme has a specific focus on gender equality and women's empowerment.

In partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF) and UN Women, around 100 young changemakers benefited from the 2017 YLP 3 Regional Forum. The event took the form of a collaborative space where five youth from each of the participating countries engaged in a variety of technical and hands-on sessions anchored in four thematic areas—namely, civic engagement, partnerships and alliances, technology and alternative finance. Fourteen countries across the Arab region took part in YLP 3 during 2017, with UNDP Country Offices hosting national activities for over 1,000 youth. Youth participating in this programme received ongoing support for their ideas throughout the year.

On the second day of the 5-day event, the participants attended the RiseUp Summit. The summit is the MENA region's largest innovation and entrepreneurship event, taking place in the heart of downtown Cairo annually. The event offered the youth a range of workshops and training sessions, relevant to the objectives and approach of YLP 3, and an opportunity to interact with speakers who have actively worked for positive change in their communities. The participants uttered that the summit provided a space for the youth to engage with and learn from social entrepreneurs and experts. «In particular, my experience at RiseUp was groundbreaking. It





showcased a side of the region, and my country, that I didn't know it existed. It's inspiring to see that there are so many movements towards a sustainable future being born here in Egypt», said Omar Sobhy Kanoma, one of the YLP participants.

***“We need to have a dream to chase, and be brave to follow our passions. You are the agents of change, and you have the ability to decide what the future will be like for you, me and your children”***, underscored Luis Martinez Betanzos, UNDP Regional Electoral Advisor, in his closing remarks. He highlighted that each of the participants has the untapped potential to contribute to greater sustainability, prosperity and gender equality. Mr. Betanzos' perspectives were echoed by Yakup Beris, the UNDP Regional Programme Coordinator or, who emphasized the importance of youth's dedication to sustainable development.

A key outcome of the YLP 3 regional forum was the “YLP Declaration”, formulated and ratified by the participants including representatives from YLP 1 and YLP 2 that were present in the workshop. The Declaration strengthened their sense of membership and commitment to the YLP initiative and community, and crystallized their intent for involvement going forward. **“The Declaration will guide UNDP in the conceptualization of YLP. We think it is a powerful tool to enhance youth-related programming at the national level”**, concluded Yakup Beris. The Forum culminated with presentations of the participants' prototypes, showcasing the progress achieved during the programme and with the selection of the top change makers, who will represent the region at the ECOSOC Global Youth Forum in New York in January.

As it concludes its third year, the Youth Leadership Programme received very positive feedback from participants. **«YLP facilitated my introduction to a whole group of change-makers that want to use their talents to move the world in the right direction. My network has grown immensely, and my prototype was rebuilt into a more sustainable idea. YLP has been extremely fulfilling»**, said Salma Benhassine, reflecting on her experience with the programme. The youth networking has planted a sustainable seed that will ensure regional cooperation beyond the confinements of YLP, transgressing borders and cultural differences.