NEWSLETTER

United Nations Development Programme

ACINET and UNDP join forces to enhance civil society participation in UNCAC implementation

With 182 States Parties, the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) stands as the only legally binding universal instrument against corruption. The UNCAC, which entered into force in 2005, includes key provisions on prevention, criminalization, law enforcement, international cooperation and asset recovery. Also, it affirms the important role of society –individuals and organizations– in achieving the objectives of the Convention, including in Article 13, by calling on governments to increase transparency and citizen participation in decision-making and to enhance public reporting and access to information. Since 2009, the Convention has had an Implementation Review Mechanism to promote cooperation between States Parties and help them to identify compliance gaps and related technical assistance needs. Although the inclusion of non-governmental actors, including civil society and businesses, in the Mechanism is only optional, it is indeed encouraged, with potential for participation in multiple steps of the process as evident by country experiences worldwide, including in the Arab states region. For this reason, UNDP has consistently supported cooperation between key stakeholders in this regard, and has published related recommendations in the Guidance Note on "UNCAC Self-Assessments: Going beyond the Minimum", which is also available in Arabic.

The "Non-Governmental Group" of the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network (ACINET), in its regional workshop in Amman on 12-13 July, affirmed the importance of additional efforts in this regard, especially as the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism enters its second phase (2016-2021), covering Chapter II on Preventive Measures and Chapter V on Asset Recovery. Not only both chapters are particularly relevant to the region, but their implementation is better assessed if there is proper participation from society. Other than key provisions related to national anti-corruption policies and agencies and integrity reforms in civil service, public procurement and the judiciary, among others, Chapter II also includes various provisions that have a direct impact on public participation and private companies. Chapter V, on the other hand, covers a topic that is often considered a priority for civil society movements across the region, which the recovery of stolen assets. The coordinator of the Group, Hilda Ajeilat, emphasized that "*engaging independent actors, including from civil society and the business community will enhance the legitimacy of the findings, while also offering the opportunity for inclusive dialogue on the way forward*".

In response, the UNDP's regional project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries (ACIAC) launched a dedicated initiative in August to strengthen the engagement of non-governmental actors in reviewing and promoting UNCAC implementation under the umbrella of ACINET. The project leader, Arkan El Seblani, explained that the "*initiative provides an informal*

regional-level capacity-development platform that maximizes access to scarce expertise, while facilitating knowledge-sharing among non-governmental actors, according to him, "this will contribute to the rationalization of the debate, steering it away from populist discourses and undue politicization".

ACIAC started its support to the members of the ACINET Non-Governmental Group, with introductory one-day national trainings in three countries. The first one was held on 8 August in Jordan in cooperation with the Jordan Transparency Center, and the second on 18 August in Lebanon with the Lebanese Transparency Association, while the third was in Tunisia on 25 August with the Tunisian Alliance for Integrity and Transparency under the umbrella of the recently established Anti-Corruption Civil Coalition in partnership with Tunisian National Anti-Corruption Authority.

As a result, participants became better acquainted with the provisions of the Convention and the requirements of its Implementation Review Mechanism, including the related commitments of their governments. At the end of the training, Josephine Zgheib from Lebanon commented: "this training opened our eyes to things we did not know and gave us ideas for concrete action on the ground". The three trainings also offered the opportunity for activists to discuss the way forward for enhancing their own participation in related processes. "This is a very good starting point" said Ouroub Al Khatib from Jordan, "but it is important for us to continue to establish national networks to learn from the past and be better prepared for the next steps". Participants expressed their determination to reach out to governments to follow up on the findings of the first phase of UNCAC reviews (2010-2015), while urging them to start early on the second phase. To that end, Adnaen Nouioua from Tunisia stressed that "building trust and enhanced communication between the civil society and the government is essential."

Building up on this initial engagement, more activities are planned for the next months in the run up to the upcoming seventh session of the UNCAC Conference of States Parties to be held in Vienna on 06-10 November 2017 and beyond. By strengthening their individual, organizational and coalitional capacities across the region, it is expected that this initiative shall enable non-governmental actors to become a more effective partner to State institutions and a more professional representative of society, ultimately enhancing the inclusiveness and effectiveness of UNCAC implementation.

Inauguration of the Um Qais training room to support anti-corruption efforts in Jordan

The Jordanian Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission (JIACC) inaugurated its "Um Qais Training Room" on 12 September. The facility was established with the support of UNDP Jordan and the UNDP region project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries. The aim is to help the Commission enhance their capacity building programme through applying multi-faceted approaches, including learning-oriented sessions, focusing on different aspects of the National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy.

The knowledge-sharing facility comes as part of an important partnership between the UNDP

Seoul Policy Center and the Seoul Metropolitan Government in the Republic of Korea, to promote integrity and efficiency in the public construction sector, with the continuous technical support of the Regional Project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab countries. The facility will also facilitate South-South and triangle cooperation with the support of UNDP's regional and global platforms, in addition to the well-established partnerships with UNDP's partners in the Republic of Korea.

UNDP and Sida sign a $6.7 million agreement to advance economic integration in the Arab region

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) signed today a cost-sharing agreement in the amount of USD 6.7 million (SEK 54,800,000) for three years to strengthen Arab economic integration for inclusive sustainable development. The agreement will contribute to promoting trade and deepening Arab economic integration as well as enhancing coherence of trade-related policies. It will also aim at improving the business environment and the competitiveness of the region to enabling the creation of sustainable jobs in the future.

"*Sweden is committed to supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development*" asserted Eva Smedberg, Head of Division of Middle East and North Africa, at Sida, who signed the agreement on the agency's behalf. "*To that end, we believe that trade can play a major role in economic growth and poverty reduction*". Poverty reduction is the overall goal of Sweden's development cooperation and contributes to peace and stability as it is the aim of the Strategy for the Middle East and North Africa.

The agreement will support a new project entitled "Arab Economic Integration - PAFTA Plus", which aims to take regional economic cooperation to a new level that improves competitiveness of Arab goods and services, strengthens partnerships in trade policy design, and creates economic opportunities for youth and women. The project will provide technical assistance to the League of Arab States (LAS) and its Member States to implement the Pan Arab Free Trade Agreement (PAFTA), which came as a result of the recently-concluded Arab Agreement on Liberalization in Trade in Services, and the establishment of the Arab Customs Union (ACU). The project will also contribute to reforms aiming at diversification of economic activities undertaken by Arab countries, particularly oil-exporting countries, in recent years.

The new initiative will scale up support to policy makers for the modernization of the supply and value chains and the reform of policies in preparations for the ACU, in areas such as facilitating trade and transport corridors, promoting investment in quality infrastructure, and enhancing competition, among others. This will strengthen economic partnerships in the region through better Arab connectivity and stronger coordination among countries. Throughout its activities, the project will promote the role of private business and industries in economic integration and diversification and will focus on issues of gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

"*We are happy to continue our partnership with Sida to promote growth and sustainable*

development in the Arab region" stressed Khaled Abdelshafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub in Amman, who signed the agreement on behalf of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States. "*Building on the positive results we have achieved together over the past years through the* Aid for Trade Initiative for Arab States, *this new partnership will help us leverage our best expertise and scale up our efforts, to support economic integration in the Arab States*".

The UNDP-Sida collaboration on the "Aid for Trade Initiative for Arab States" supported the League of Arab States (LAS) in the implementation of resolutions and decisions by Arab Leaders in the areas of trade in services, preparations for the Arab Customs Union and trade facilitation. The project also assisted the operationalization of cross-border operations between Egypt and Sudan and supported Egypt and Jordan in the establishment of National Single Windows.

VISUALIZE 2030 - The First SDGS Data Dive Camp in the Arab Region

The data revolution is an essential cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and data are considered to be one of the fundamental pillars of the accountability framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Improved access to data could tremendously contribute to the Arab region's social, economic, and environmental development and to advancing people's lives at all levels.

However, despite the fact that the number of internet users in the Arab region is expected to reach 197 million by 2017, making up almost half the population of the Arab region, online access to quality data in the Arab region remains difficult. This might be explained by the prevalence of data gaps and data illiteracy, but it is mainly related to ineffective channels of data dissemination –especially for official statistics. In many Arab countries, data are presented in time-consuming formats or provided only by request, which discourages users from making an effort to comprehend the data at hand, making data elitist rather than accessible to the general public.

As part of its efforts to address these challenges, the Arab Development Portal (ADP) launched the **First SDGs Data Dive Camp in the Arab region** (Beirut, 19-23 October) titled "**Visualize 2030**". The Data Camp aims at stimulating usage of development data by youth to visualize their country (or the region) by 2030 and to share their concerns and priorities for a better country/region. By encouraging the use of data, we aim at nurturing a more informed public debate on issues related to the SDGs.

A call for applications for innovative and brilliant minds in the Arab region was launched asking youth (aged 18-30) to apply to the Data camp by **September 10**. Selected participants and guest speakers will gather in Beirut on 19-23 October to produce visual products/content in line with their initial propositions. Trainers and experts will join the camp to guide the youth through the implementation phase.

For more information and to apply, please visit this page.

Young 'Transparency Knights' gear up to fight corruption in Jordan

While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), they also include additional areas of focus. A milestone addition is SDG 16, which is dedicated to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

One of the targets of SDG 16 aims at substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms. This is a very relevant objective for the Arab region, which scores 32.71 out of 100 in the 2016 Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International, compared to a global average of 42.94.

The Jordan Transparency Center (JTC) and UNDP's regional project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries (ACIAC) have for several years joined efforts to help the country make greater strides in this regard. Now, they have another important ally to support their work. Since the beginning of 2017, and as part of a broader regional initiative by UNDP, JTC and ACIAC have been working with universities across different governorates, to raise the awareness of students on anti-corruption, connecting motivated youth and helping them to become more engaged in related discussions taking place at the national level.

In this framework, twenty-five university students organized under "Transparency Knights", a youth-driven network established by JTC, met in Amman on 9 August to warm up for their battle against corruption. In five teams of two, volunteer students researched for a week information on international anti-corruption standards and their application in Jordan. Then reported back to their peers what they've found, also presenting their own ideas on the topic, their perception of the corruption phenomenon and recommendations on how to strengthen the youth's role in fighting it. By preparing these presentations, the youth had the opportunity to familiarize with the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) –the only legally binding universal anti-corruption instrument – its provisions and implementation review mechanism. Students have also highlighted Jordan's anti-corruption measures and achievements so far, namely its establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2006 and its evolution afterwards to become the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission in 2016, as well as the National Strategy for Integrity and Anti-Corruption for 2017-2025.

A joint JTC-UNDP panel of experts listened to the presentations and provided technical feedback to each team, which will help the students improve in similar future endeavors. Arkan El Seblani, ACIAC's Chief Technical Advisor congratulated all the youth for their efforts, underlying that "*this is just the beginning of a long journey, where each and everyone's efforts is key towards a future with more transparent and less corrupt institutions*".

The panel also awarded Ms. Lara Obaid and Ms. Baraa Ghayyada as the best team, who gave a brilliant presentation of UNCAC's review mechanisms.

Women and youth as agents of peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Violent extremism has become a serious threat across the world, including the Euro-Mediterranean region. It affects human security and economic stability, as well as the well-being, dignity, and rights of people. Within this context, a two-day meeting was jointly organized by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Secretariat, UNDP, and UN Women on 18-19 July, 2017 in Barcelona, bringing together more than 40 experts, practitioners and advocates in peace and security and prevention of violent extremism (PVE).

The objective was to take stock of current research and experience on preventing extremism and radicalization with a specific focus on the roles of women and youth, while also discussing approaches and lessons learned at the regional and national levels and identifying needs and key areas for future interventions in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Preventing violent extremism is a topic high on the policy agenda of many governments in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Until recently, the challenges presented by violent extremism have been evaluated primarily through security lenses. However, evidence and experience show that success against violent extremism will require responses that address political, social, and economic drivers with a human rights-based approach. While traditional counterterrorism approaches are essential to detecting, averting, and addressing violent extremism and terrorist plots, prevention focused programs provide a way to reduce the threat in the long-term.

A growing body of evidence shows also that women and youth can and do play active and important roles in preventing extremism and radicalization. They have the ability to delegitimize extremist narratives in their communities and take an important role in designing and shaping effective programmes and strategies. To this end the meeting reaffirmed that while women and youth can play a significant role in PVE, they need to be supported and empowered to do so.

Calling for a collaborating approach, building on each other's comparative advantage, Zena Ali Ahmad –Deputy Director of UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States –said: *"Let's put our expertise together to devise innovative solutions that promote the role of youth and women to prevent violence and build peace in their communities".*

The meeting provided a platform for participating experts with a broad range of expertise to interact and strategize the development of more nuanced, tailored and effective PVE strategies. The experts emphasized the impact of violent extremism on populations and spoke of the often overlooked impact on women and youth in particular.

"Women are the first to experience violent extremism. Efforts need to be steeped up to protect them and strengthen their role in decision making and early warning" stressed Mohammad Naciri –UNWOMEN Regional Director for Arab States.

The literature presented pointed to the intricacy of violent extremism in relation to economic, social, cultural, governmental and religious factors. It was noted that the drivers of recruitment and radicalization vary according to local context, and as such, prevention strategies must be tailored and nuanced in order to be effective. Furthermore, these strategies must be better-coordinated among practitioners, local authorities, regional and multilateral organizations, and civil society in order to achieve sustainable impact.

In December 2015, the UN Secretary-General presented a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Similarly, Security Council's Resolution 1325 (2000), 2242 (2015) and 2250 (2015) provide an additional framework to promote the role of women and young people in conflict prevention, prevention of violent extremism, and peacebuilding.

As a follow-up to the experts meeting, actionable recommendations will be presented to the governments in the Euro-Mediterranean region. In addition, a regional action plan will be drafted and discussed with key partners in the region, with the aim of supporting and empowering women and youth to prevent violent extremism in the Mediterranean region.

The Arab Knowledge Project at Japan's 12th Interdisciplinary social sciences conference

The Arab Knowledge Project team participated in the 12th interdisciplinary social sciences conference, held in Hiroshima, Japan, on 26-28 July 2017. The 3-day event was organized by the U.S.-based Common Ground Research Networks, with the aim of exploring disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, within and across the various social sciences, and between the social, natural and applied sciences. The conference included more than 30 sessions with around 300 participants (academia, representatives of international organisations and policymakers) from about 100 countries.

In a dedicated session on "Measuring Knowledge from a Development Perspective: The Knowledge Index as a Case Study", the team of the Arab Knowledge Project (AKP) introduced the Arab Knowledge Index as a leading international interdisciplinary initiative to measure the linkages between knowledge and development.

Hany Torky (AKP Chief Technical Advisor) stressed that both knowledge and development are at the center of inter- and trans- disciplinary social sciences. He added that "the importance of the index stems from the important role of knowledge today, in the various sectors of human civilization, and more specifically in the context of development" and that "even though there is an abundance of international indices that deal with areas related to development, economy, governance, and human welfare, there is shortage in international measures that focus specifically on knowledge".

Mariam Itani (researcher at AKP) emphasized that "the Knowledge Index is based on the concept that each nation has its own knowledge capital that supports and catalyzes the achievement of sustainable human development".

Itani and Torky also flagged some of the challenges faced during the work of AKP, including the limited data availability, and more specifically measures related to knowledge and knowledge retention. AKP is also planning to help national institutions enhance knowledge development in their own countries through appropriate plans and policies.

Drawing from their experience with the Arab Reading Index, the AKP team also contributed to a session on education. One of the key concerns raised by the discussion is the short attention spans and the fact the fragmentation of reading caused by social media. This makes it more difficult for students to focus on reading and acquire knowledge, and more challenging also for teachers who need to smartly take advantage of the "intelligent attention spans" of students.

Accelerating Social Change: Youth Unite to Support Arab States Changemakers

Change is in the air this summer thanks to an innovative collaboration between the Youth Leadership Program and Hult International Business School.

The Youth Leadership Program (YLP) was launched in 2015 with the aim of empowering youth and promoting their role as agents of change in their communities. Since then, it has been providing youth in the Arab States region with the inspiration, assistance, and platforms necessary for pursuing their ideas for social change.

Photo credit: Hult University

YLP operates on the belief that innovation can play a critical role in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and is designed and delivered with particular emphasis on strengthening YLP participants' social innovation skills. As part of the program, national, regional, and global events provide complementary support in the form of knowledge, partnerships and networks to strengthen young change-makers' skills and amplify their positive impact.

This summer, YLP seized the opportunity to facilitate an exchange between YLP participants and Hult International Business School students as part of a course titled "Business and Social Innovation." The course, led by Professor Joanne Lawrence, introduces students to the concept of socially driven innovation and the potential of business to creatively address some of the world's greatest societal challenges, while remaining true to its mission as an economic entity. This collaboration builds upon an ongoing partnership between UNDP's Regional Innovation Team in the Arab States and Hult International Business School under which the Innovation Team introduces national and regional development challenges to Hult students who then work to address those issues through social innovation. This year, with the engagement of YLPers, the challenges presented to the students took on a particularly immediate and personal nature.

As part of the exchange, a select number of YLPers presented the solutions they have developed through their participation in YLP to address various challenges they face in their communities and the hurdles they are encountering in moving their initiatives forward. Hult students then researched, brainstormed, and developed recommendations for the YLPers. The interaction between Hult students and our young change-makers provided an opportunity for fresh ideas to be considered and has enriched YLPers' initiatives with practical business advice. Prof. Lawrence expressed the importance of the academic course being linked with the reality on the ground: "The projects make the course come to life. The students are inspired, and they feel they are tackling something that will make a lasting difference."

This year, four YLP participants took part in the UNDP-Hult exchange: Alaa and Anas from Sudan and Hayfa and Houssem from Tunisia.

Anas's project, Bizra, was created in response to the economic, social, and political instability within the Kutum villages in North Darfur. Inspired by the emergence of gum arabic as a high-earning cash crop due to increased global demand, the Bizra project proposes planting Acacia Senegal Trees, which produce the crop, in designated agricultural areas as a way of increasing farmers' earnings and supporting economic stability. The two Hult students who studied the challenges associated with the Birza project have already added value through their

comprehensive research report. "It was an enriching and paradigm shifting experience for me and my team at Bizra, with very useful suggestions and insights. And hopefully this is just the beginning of a long-lasting mentorship relationship," said Anas.

Alaa's project, SHE CAN, aims to empower young women in Sudan by delivering lectures and organizing support groups. For her, the benefits of collaboration with Hult were immediate. "The fact that they [the Hult students] could bring a solution to the main challenge I had, which is a great social stigma, in such a short time is very impressive. I have discussed their ideas with my team and we are currently looking at incorporating them into our project."

UNDP will expand and accelerate its efforts to drive social change through youth-led innovation for development in the Arab States region.

The Youth Leadership Program, which originally began at the country level and expanded to the regional level, has tapped into the opportunity to create long-lasting relationships and mentorships that extend far beyond one workshop, conference, or course. As UNDP launches YLP 2017, the role of collaboration and innovation remain central. Building on the foundation of ideation and design thinking established during YLP 2015 and 2016, this third iteration of YLP will focus on the application of innovative methodologies and approaches in supporting the acceleration of ideas into action. With the success of collaborations like YLP-Hult, UNDP is eager to continue supporting opportunities for youth to engage and learn from each other as they leverage social innovation to make progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

About Hult International Business School

Hult International Business School students hail from 150+ countries and attend classes at one of six campuses around the world. The school strives to create leaders who are able to integrate commercial success and societal well-being, and is home to the Hult Prize - the world's largest student social entrepreneurship competition.

ACINET builds non-governmental capacities for UNCAC implementation and collective action

The Non-Governmental Group of the Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network (ACINET) held a regional workshop in Amman on 12-13 July 2017 with the support of the UNDP Regional Project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries (ACIAC) and in cooperation with the Jordan Transparency Center. It was attended by representatives of 18 of the 23 members of the Group, including civil society organizations, business associations and universities. Participants deepened their knowledge on the requirements for reviewing and supporting the implementation of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and identified a number of follow up activities to enhance the inclusiveness and effectiveness of related efforts in the region. A key initiative in this regard is the work to develop indicators that enable monitoring *de facto* compliance with key UNCAC provisions such as integrity in procurement, the effectiveness of financial disclosures and the independence of supreme audit institutions and anti-corruption agencies. Azmi Shuaibi from Arab Parliamentarians against Corruption (ArPAC) stressed the importance of this initiative: "**this work is cutting-edge not only in the region but also worldwide. It will help us articulate stronger positions and more specific reform recommendations**".

In parallel, participants also received training on how to promote collective action against corruption, and were prepared to carry out related activities in their respective countries with focus on key sectors for development, starting with the health and customs sectors, and in cooperation with national anti-corruption authorities, whenever possible. Commenting on the potential role that ACINET's Non-Governmental Group can play in this regard, Majdi Hassan from the Arab Institute for Business Leaders (IACE) stated: **"engaging businesses in collective action against corruption is a challenge, they need platforms that help them feel more secure and enable them to have better access to market incentives"**.

The various sessions also allowed participants to share updates on recent achievements and emerging challenges in their countries and to exchange views on how to address related issues, highlighting the importance of expanding their engagement with universities and the youth in the region, and increasing their support to non-governmental actors who are working to promote peace and good governance in conflict-affected areas in Arab countries.