**Diversity Advancement in the Arab Region (DAAR) Regional Project – Inception Phase**

**مشروع دار للحفاظ على التنوّع في المنطقة العربية**

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| **Brief Description** |
| The Arab States region continues to experience conflict, protracted crises and heightened polarization; bringing about development rollbacks, suffering, massive internal displacement and migration and destruction of infrastructure. The social infrastructure has also been hit hard. Currently, the region is home to 13.9 million refugees -including the Palestinian refugees- representing 55% of world refugees, most of whom are hosted in the region, and to 15.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) making up 38.5% of the world IDPs. The thinning of the region’s once-diverse social fabric and strong social capital means has affected the resilience of the people and of societies and their capacity to reverse the negative trends at the individual, collective and institutional levels.  The Arab region is a complex and diverse world, within which exists a cultural diversity that manifests in multiple dimensions: ethnic, tribal, religious, and linguistic, resulting from history, tradition, and immigration. The Diversity Advancement in the Arab Region (DAAR) regional project will shed light on the diversity spread across the Arab countries in general, and on the management of this diversity. It aims to restore diversity at the social, political and economic levels by investing in (1) supporting policy-oriented research, (2) designing tools and methodologies, (3) opening up knowledge exchange space and networking and (4) advising on legislation and policies that are conducive to advancing the governance of diversity.  In the inception phase, DAAR will organize a series of experts group meetings to design a depoliticized and knowledge-based framework of action. The meetings will identify global and regional partners, agree on outcome areas and outputs, and brainstorm impactful activities for 2020-2021 (in line with SP).  The outcome of the inception phase is a project document that has been developed following a participatory approach and endorse by senior management and a willingness to commit and support from strategic partners and donors. |

UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021):

**Outcome 3: Build resilience to shocks and crises**

DAAR is linked to the following interventions identified in UNDP’s Strategic Plan (2018-2021) under Outcome 3:

* The **quality of core government functions and ability to provide reliable and inclusive basic services** asthe foundation of the social contract between the people and state.
* Ensuring thatj**ustice and redress mechanisms** have a central role in social cohesion and are used when establishing conditions for stability and development.
* Supporting and strengthening **local governance systems to be more representative and inclusive, incorporating the views of marginalized and vulnerable groups**
* Supporting increased **participation of women in all areas of peace and security decision-making processes** is needed

The Project will specifically feed into the achievement of two out of the six cross-cutting signature solutions (SS); namely SS2 “Strengthen effective, inclusive and accountable governance” and SS3 “Enhance national prevention and recovery capacities for resilience societies” and focus on SDG 16. The Project will also be developed to give special attention to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SS 6) across all its components.

**Background**

The Arab region is a plural and heterogenous region characterized by enormous ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. It has been known for its cosmopolitanism as well as diversity and flexibility, accommodating different cultures, religions and political inclinations. The rapid developments of recent years have drastically altered the social, political and economic landscapes of most countries in the region.

Findings of recent perception survey by the Arab Barometer (Wave IV), covering 8,991 respondents from Algeria, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon and Jordan show discomfort towards the other. More than one-fifth of the respondents (26.8%) said that they dislike having to live with a neighbour of a different religion. It is highest in Algeria (51%), followed by Morocco (37%), Tunisia (27%) and Jordan (23%). Similar findings are inferred when the respondents were asked about people of different race and color. Additionally, 25% of the respondents stated that they would not like to have to live with “immigrants or foreign workers” as neighbors. The rate is highest in Lebanon at 37.5%.[[1]](#footnote-1)

These findings indicate that diversity has become a challenge that people face and deal with on a daily basis, and hostility towards people with different cultural backgrounds has increased. The surge of exclusionary identity politics together with rising polarization, among which is sectarian and ethnic is affecting the region’s social fabric, leading to the formation of more homogenous communities, especially in urban areas where the concept of multi-cultural cities managing diversity as a resource has not yet kicked in.

Sectarian identity politics in the region is commonly ascribed to four interconnected elements: the weakness of Arab nation-states; pre-existing ethno-sectarian divides, the power vacuums that arose in the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings; and the efforts of extra-regional players to strike geopolitical advantages.[[2]](#footnote-2) Here, it is important to make a distinction between deficient and exclusive state-building process and state weakness, and the latter tend to dominate the traditional narrative explaining persistence of sectarianism in the Arab region. Recent research argues that “deepening sectarian polarization and the sectarian idiom in which current regional conflicts play out are the result not of state weakness but of long-term state building processes.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The “exclusive state-building process” argument opens the way to reverse the trend of exclusion and rising homogeneity especially at times of economic and societal transformation. **Public debate on discrimination, exclusion, citizenship and minority’s rights has never been as outspoken, and it is important for UNDP to build on this momentum by developing a depoliticized knowledge-based framework of action to advance diversity in public-urban space, legislation, education and work space.**

**Developing a regional framework of action**

The inception phase will offer enough evidence to show that not only there is value for UNDP RBAS to invest in developing regional a framework of action but that it is quite timely given the on-going internal displacement, migration and polarization. Moreover, there is intense momentum at the level of civil society organizations and multi-level agents of change, including young and open parliamentarians and policy-maker, to engage in multi-country and regional frameoworks.

The fact that the Tunisian Parliament has approved an anti-discriminatory law to outlaw all forms of discrimination in the country to protect the dignity of individuals and establish full equality resembles a positive alert. This law is the result of more than two years of campaigning by civil society organizations who launched anti-discrimination campaigns despite conservative attempts to maintain the status quo for social and religious reasons. This historic achievement for Tunisian opens a much-needed crack for civil society organizations from other countries to regain hope and inspiration and eventually replicate. Governments can create conditions that prevent specific groups from becoming isolated and individuals’ options to participate in society from being reduced and to be appreciative of and value the merit of differences.

The preservation of diversity is inevitable in a climate of withdrawal and isolation. Here, it is important to emphasize the need to advance a culture and environment that fosters multi-identities and acknowledges the evolving nature of culturla identities. Establishing the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage would bring not only peace to societies but also richness and innovation. For example, in a fast-changing business environment, studies have shown that increasing the diversity (gender, age, nation of origin (meaning employees born in a country other than the one in which the company is headquartered), career path, industry background, and education) teams leads to more and better innovation and improved financial performance in both developing and developed economies.

The proposed areas of work (to be validated at the end of the Inception Period) are:

* Diversity as an unconditional right.

Governance of diversity by encouraging the adoption of antidiscriminatory legislation and designing inclusive policies.

* Diversity as a resource and economic asset.

Economy : supporting research and design of integrative models showing the transformative value of diverse work space.

Public-Urban space : support emergence of multi-cultural cities.

* Diversity as an value of consensus rather than dispute.
* Research on « perception towrds other » and identifyin entrypoints to reverse perceptions
* Media coverage/monitoring
* Intereligious dialogue and religious education, etc.

**Theory of Change as a guiding framework and reflection on PSCAR**

“The ToC is a living framework that responds to the emerging and evolving needs of countries and partners. Over the course of implementing the Strategic Plan for 2018-2021, UNDP will continuously monitor *how* change takes place since development pathways may require modification and re-calibration once the effectiveness and efficiencies of interventions are assessed. Assumptions will be monitored, validated or adjusted based on data and evidence, risks will be continuously identified, mitigated, monitored and managed, and emerging issues will affect adjustments to programme and project design and implementation strategies. UNDP will utilize the ToC as a tool to apply lessons learned to future programming.”

With the TOC acting as a reference framework, a reflection of the Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region (PSCAR) regional project was conducted, and the preliminary findings indicate that “social cohesion” is a negatively loaded term, especially when translated to Arabic, while “diversity” has the potential to stir more positive reaction among COs, policy-makers and donors. It is also more relevant to countries that are stable and less affected by conflict but are showing signs of increasing dominance by a majority. It is also perceived as less judgemental and less political and more supportive of the human rights framework. With this mind, the inception phase of DAAR will also discuss these findings during the experts group meetings and with partners.

**Objectives and activities of the Inception Phase (2019)**

The primary goal of the Inception phase is to achieve senior management and stakeholder consensus regarding the objectives and scope of work the project, build momentum among promising donors and mobilize resources.

More specifically, this phase will:

* Brainstorm with stakeholders policy and pragmatic entrypooints to advance diversity in the Arab region;
* Identify partners at the national, regional and global levels;
* Develop a project document to be endorsed by senior management;
* Establish a strategic advisory board; and
* Mobilize resourecs.

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| **Initiation Plan: Restructuring PSCAR** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **Mar** | **Apr** | **May** | **Jun** | **Jul** | **Aug** | **Sep** |  | **Oct** | **Dec** |
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| Produce a concept note on "safeguarding diversity in the Arab region" |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Hold experts group meeting (targeting potential donors/partners) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Carry out a resource mobilization tour |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Produce project document |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Present to senior management for buy-in |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Hold an open-house at Hub |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Produce and launch the "Reflections on Diversity in the Arab Region: An Inside-Out Analysis" (KAICIID funded) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Activities and budget of Inception Phase (2019)**

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| **Budget** |  |
| Two Experts' group meetings (25 people) | 35000 |
| Consultant (to co-draft CN and project document) (25 days) | 15000 |
| Resource mobilization tour (EU, regional centers/6 missions) | 12000 |
| Research assistant | 7200 |
| Production of communications material (leaflet, spot, etc.) | 4000 |
| Open house at Hub (strategic partners) | 25000 |
| **Total** | **98,200** |

1. <http://www.arabbarometer.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The Levant Search for a Regional Order*, December 2018. (to ref) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sovereignty versus Sectarianism: Contested Norms… (p. 25) (to complete ref) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)