RBAS RESPONSES TO COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM THE PAC MEMBERS FOR THE REGIONAL PROJECT ON PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION IN ARAB STATES

The following provides RBAS responses to the comments received for its new project on Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region.

1) BCPR/CRU

Endorses with no further comments. The team has been involved closely during the formulation phase.

2) RBA

Endorses with no further comments.

3) RBAP Comments

RBAS Action: Explore areas of collaboration with RBAP on social cohesion and beyond. Utilize the N-Peace experience to inform the planned activities (already utilized in the regional gender project, explore further opportunities for the social cohesion project). *Note: Initial communication has already been established.*

- It is good to note that UNDP Country Offices in the region are emphasized as major partners in the achievement of the project results. As for all regional projects an important factor for achieving and sustaining results for the social cohesion regional project will also be to work effectively with COs so that its targeted measures and initiatives become part of the UNDP programmes and work with national governments and other partners at the country level.

- The project rightly emphasizes partnerships with national governments, religious, educational institutions, CSOs and private sector. It is however, silent on how it will engage and partner with other UN agencies who might have program portfolios targeting similar issues of social cohesion in the region. While unaware of the present status of this action plan, one useful reference could be the work and the UN partnerships envisaged under the "*UNDG (Arab States/MENA) Response Strategy & Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive Development Path within a New Arab Social Contract between State and Citizen - 14 October 2011*" (copy attached). This was shared in a 2012 Regional UNDG meeting in A-P. As you will note, this Framework of Action incudes many of the priority areas of work targeted under the new regional project from a joint UN regional programming angle.

- The Phase I of the project will also undertake important inception activities, which include the establishing of baselines and indicators to measure social cohesion and to track its progress. One of the main challenges to evidence-based programming and effective M&E in many countries is the lack of good quality information. This is especially true for complex issues such as social cohesion and in fragile country contexts. Hence, the establishing of a system of data collection and analysis

Commented [NA1]: Noted with thanks. This will continue to be our guiding principle as well

Commented [NA2]: Mourad Wahba, RBAS Deputy Director, responded to this point indicating that we are in talks with DPA as a partner in the project. Starting with this, we will be seeking cooperation with the other UN agencies, as noted in the strategy section, as necessary.

may need to be a valuable component of the project to establish important baseline data, amongst others, which may be not be currently available.

- Related to inter-regional sharing of experiences, one of the useful areas of work for relevant replication could be the N-Peace from the A-P region. N-Peace was established in October 2010 to mark the ten-year anniversary of UNSCR 1325 with two main objectives: (i) to support the leadership of women in building peace and preventing conflicts; and (ii) to provide a platform for engagement and increase dialogue between key actors working on women, peace and security (WPS). This multi-country initiative presently operates in Indonesia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste and more recently in Afghanistan and the Philippines. N-Peace helps to support and portray women as Peace Leaders; documents stories of peace champions; has over 150,000 people engaged through online voting tools and 2.7 m engaged through social media.

Some discussions to initiate collaboration between the two regions in this area of work was initiated earlier this year and could be discussed further and additional information shared, if needed.

- While the contexts between the Arab States and the Pacific are quite different, this is to share some lessons learned from some small grants program in Fiji aimed at enabling people to define and develop social cohesion projects of their own design. The table below are some of key success factors and key indicators that were identified by UNDP colleagues from the Pacific Centre.

Success Factor	Indicators
Networking	· Level of associativity among grantee organizations · Number of Connections encouraged by facilitators · Perception on the quality and usefulness of these alliances
Participation – Inclusiveness	· Approval by traditional leaders/community leaders · Level of community participation and CSO accountability
Social Problem Solving	· Capacity to collectively identify social issues · Capacity to collectively address social issues · Perception on quality of experience
Ownership-empowerment	· Extent to which CSO and their beneficiaries feel empowered to protagonize change
Accountability	· Changes in perception of decision-making structures

4) RBEC Comments

<u>**Action:**</u> Review the text for the use of the terms "citizens/citizenship". Continue to recognize those groups that are often excluded from the traditional definition through the concept of "equal citizenship".

Action: Include a reference in the strategy section in the document to highlight the need to also creatively work with social movements, new and 'virtual' associations, community-based organizations and volunteers (in collaboration with UNV).

Action: Provide clarification under Output 4 and in the strategy section regarding youth and women being two distinct target beneficiary and partner although they also overlap as a group. The project document deliberately puts emphasis on young women where this overlap becomes critically important.

Action: Review the partnership section with regards to what additional names of organizations could be listed, without going into a long list of every possible institution (this may actually risk leaving out some names that could be counter-productive). E.g. refer to Arab Women Organization and CAWTAR as ongoing partnerships under the regional gender project to be also utilized for this project.

Thank for your sharing this important project document with us. It addresses a number of key current priorities in the region. Some concepts may be better defined or take a more nuanced approach:

- Citizenship: the document uses this term to refer to society in general, but social cohesion (as well as human rights compliance) requires involving those who are not legal citizens (e.g., refugees, migrants, displaced persons) who are present in increasing numbers in many states in the region. It is also important to emphasize engaging with and addressing the needs of minorities and women among them, since they face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

- Strengthening civil society and state-society relations: while this is welcome, greater attention can be paid to strengthening freedoms of association and expression, given the restrictions placed on these rights by the majority of governments in the region. These are admittedly sensitive issues. But there is a case to be made for a strong UN(DP) role, in concert with other development partners, in advocacy with governments on existing legal and regulatory frameworks, to enable more robust civic engagement at all levels by different population groups. This is essential for lasting social cohesion and for the fulfilment of the principles of participation and legitimacy guiding the project. We welcome the focus on religious leaders and other faith-based actors as part of working with civil society, and also recommend working creatively with social movements, new and 'virtual' associations, community-based organizations and volunteers (in collaboration with UNV).

- Gender equality and women's rights: Women and youth are rightly highlighted for attention. But they face different challenges and require distinct strategies and approaches. Women face limitations and/or restrictions in many fundamental rights and freedoms resulting from restrictive regimes, conservative social forces, education, social attitudes and family upbringing. Support to women's entrepreneurship needs to address the many factors that limit women's participation in economic and public spheres. The weak use of women's potential in these arenas reflects the overall social and economic conditions and the state of governance. These and other issues are fully captured in the seminal 2005 regional Arab Human Development on gender equality, whose recommendations remain relevant today. Output 4 cannot therefore justifiably combine

Commented [NA6]: This is well noted and the document was reviewed to avoid such a misunderstanding. The text has been revised to avoid the use of citizens to refer to society in general. However, we kept reference to the concept of equal citizenship. The term used in the project document intends to serve as a reference point for engaging partners in implementing the project. The concept of equal citizenship has been defined as an entry point to have that discussion as an underlying concept in understanding social cohesion. Moreover, although the concept of citizens has actually been misused to refer to society in general in multiple places, the document on the overall indeed recognizes the refugees, migrants, displaced persons and other vulnerable and/or marginalized groups that may not be necessarily defined in the legal definition of citizenship. The concept of "equal citizenship" is used as a way to argue/advocate for an expanded definition of citizenship to include those that are traditionally excluded from citizenship rights and services.

Commented [NA7]: The document expresses intention to work with various non-government groups as well as rule of law and security institutions that have an impact on freedom of association and expression. This is therefore implied, although not always explicitly expressed. The document stresses inclusion as a way of understanding the related problems (although admittedly it is not necessarily the same thing but gives a more positive angle to the interventions proposed).

Commented [NA8]: This is also well noted and indeed is an aspect intended to be addressed through various outputs included in the project document. Such intention is mostly visible in Outputs 3-4.

Commented [NA9]: Well noted, we will include a reference in the strategy section to include this.

youth and women; furthermore, it is important that a project of this scope and budget allocate 15 per cent of its resources to gender equality as recommended in the corporate Gender Equality Strategy (2014-2017).

-     Partnerships: To the indicated list, we also suggest adding OIC, Arab Women's Organization (as it is part of the League of Arab States and the specialized organization working on women's empowerment in the region); the League of Arab States Women Secretariat; regional civil society networks such as CAWTAR, ANND, parliamentarians, entrepreneur associations, philanthropic groups such as Foundation for the Future. Also important to include partners / components to facilitate SS/east-east &TC exchange. UNDP in the RBEC region has practices to offer on social inclusion and local governance and community-based development that could be relevant for various outputs of the project.

Finally, we would be very happy to further engage with RBAS in this programme given the proximity of the regions and relevance of these issues in RBEC> Please note that the focal point in our team is Bharati Sadasivam, copied to this message. All the best. Olivier.

5) Gender Team

Action: Add reference to the phase 1 of the project to underline the specific gaps between intentions and implementations about human rights and policy frameworks as they affect women. The analysis at this stage would inform the activities in the second phase, keeping the gender sensitive analysis as the base for such amendments, among other analyses proposed in the first phase.

The Project has reflected a good analysis and the needs of the region , with special consideration to the women's situation. It is really good approach to maintain the coordination and collaboration as suggested between all the Regional Project under the Regional Programme with the Mosharkaa gender among others . As this is an important step to multiply the effect of the interventions on the ground.

In Output 1 Indicative activity 1.1 Develop an agreed upon methodology and assessment tool, and provide training, for assessing, measuring, and monitoring social cohesion in the region. And as it is clearly mentioned in the document that "Indicators will be developed to take into account the particular context, and measurement tools will be decided upon for conducting the research". It is recommended to add to the document that this methodology would take into consideration the undeniable gap between the lived reality of women in Arab States and the promises frameworks and the commitments in the human rights and policy frameworks, **the need for a strategy or instrument to measure the tension between intention and implementation becomes evident.** Indicators developed to means the effective implementation of the human rights and policy frameworks relevant to women, may contribute towards identifying the gaps and moving to remedy the situation. It is evident also that the principle of gender mainstreaming may be used to encourage, enhance and support social cohesion. The following definition of gender mainstreaming seems particularly appropriate.

Commented [NA10]: We hope that output 4 does not portray such lumping of the two. The relevant outputs indeed outline a response that target these groups separately but they also recognize the overlap, emphasizing especially the vulnerabilities of young Arab female. There is therefore value in discussing the two together, while avoiding to lump them into one group. It should also be noted that the regional programme should be taken in its totality as it has a dedicated regional project on gender that links with activities proposed under this project (e.g. women peace and security network). On the overall therefore, we are cinfident that 15% budget ratio is supported by what is being proposed.

Commented [NA11]: The regional bureau has MoUs with both Arab Women Organization and CAWTAR and overall partnership framework with the League of Arab States. We had separate talks with Arab Women Organization and CAWTAR on the regional gender project. We have added a sentence in the strategy/partnership section to refer to these organizations in this project document as well. We look forward to further discuss with RBEC their experience on social inclusion, local governance, and community based development

Commented [NA12]: Agreed. This will also be added as reference under this output

And as the project will be implemented into phases with the knowledge base building as the beginning , it will be good as well to highlight in the project that an amendment to the activities would be expected after better understanding of the problem on the ground.

6) **BPPS: Various Teams**

We appreciate the overall support of BPPS (especially through the former BCPR) for the project.

We have carefully reviewed all the comments. We will be using some of these to improve the document while take note of others as points to consider during the implementation.

We have incorporated the following to the project document based on the comments from the various teams of BPPS:

- Review the use of the terms "citizens/citizenship: We have reviewed the text from this angle and revised some text to avoid the misinterpretation of the term that could be read to replace "society or social groups". Having said that, we kept the emphasis on "equal citizenship" as a way of finding an entry point to work with most of the stakeholders in the region. The concept resonates well with the stakeholders in the region as it was validated during the regional consultation. The concept of equal citizenship allows to argue for more equal and inclusive definitions and applications of the term citizenship, going beyond its legalistic definitions. While the document uses citizenship frequently, this was not intended to restrict the coverage of the project only to legally defined "citizens- it also has specific references to the groups that are not covered in the legalistic definitions of this term such as the refugees. Several activities intend to target these social groups while the concept of citizenship may not imply such coverage.

- A more explicit reference was added to having a stakeholders analysis to support the analytical work on social cohesion (we have included this in the relevant proposed activities under the analytical work). Thank you for the suggestion.

- We have revised Output 1.2. based on the suggestions as the current version's output title mismatches with the content (reflecting an earlier version of the document while it had been revised later).

- On various suggestions to further emphasize the justice sector, human rights institutions, and parliaments in the work on social cohesion; the document sufficiently emphasizes the importance of rule of law institutions and human rights organizations and proposes outputs/activities targeting them. We have added further reference to parliaments under the output/activities that are already targeting law-making committees.

- Theory of change: We have reviewed the document once again from the perspective of theory of change and made some revisions to better explain this but generally found that the theory of change has been sufficiently explained in the strategy section providing the theoretical background for the project. Our approach was tested and validated through a regional consultation that was conducted through the participation of senior government

and non-government officials in the region, with experts leading the discussions. We intend to build our efforts on this approach that covers targeted efforts to improve state-society and society-society relationships that emphasizes the concept of trust to enforce social cohesion. The project proposes to work with institutions of religion, civil society, education, and media as well as youth and women groups that are viewed as critical to improve these relationships to contribute to social cohesion.

- We will be happy to receive the relevant documents, including the lessons learned, for the earlier project on "Inclusive and Participative Political Institutions Project in the Arab States Region (2012-2013). Thank you for the proposition.

- The project was deliberately designed with an open-ended initial analysis that does not prescribe solutions or pretend to have an answer to the challenges undermining social cohesion. The challenges evolve every day given the volatile nature of the region with risks to social cohesion. The concepts related to social cohesion such as equal citizenship or social contract are dynamic that require us to continuously deliberate as we implement the project with regards to their definitions and use in real contexts. A whole first phase of the project indeed is dedicated to provide deeper analysis, foster dialogue, and seek advocacy around such concepts. We prefer to have a living document, including with respect to the situation analysis and the RRF. The document would be further shaped through the initial phase that will provide more detailed baseline and target info- which are to be defined together with the partners that will also take part in implementing the project.

- The regional programme worked with COs on the design and included them in the consultation that discussed the concept note and approach that led to this prodoc.

- The regional project naturally builds on the concept of establishing a regional capacity that would be dedicated to deliver the outputs of the project while seeking the support of the BPPS (former BCPR has already effectively provided such support during the formulation phase) and partnering up with COs in the delivery. The document provides sufficient details regarding these.