



CHAPTER SEVEN

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

MEMBERS OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

BAHRAIN
EGYPT
IRAQ
JORDAN
KUWAIT
LEBANON

LIBYA
MOROCCO
OMAN
PALESTINE (OBSERVER)
QATAR
SAUDI ARABIA

SUDAN
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
TUNISIA
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
YEMEN

PURVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) is one of five regional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. UN-ESCWA is responsible for promoting economic and social development through regional and subregional cooperation and integration. The Commission provides a framework for harmonizing Member States' sectoral policies, while focusing on meeting Arab States' needs and emerging global challenges in development. UN-ESCWA reports to ECOSOC on Western Asia's economic challenges, progress and proposals for the future.

Website: www.escwa.un.org/

THE GOVERNANCE DEFICIT AND CONFLICT RELAPSE IN THE ESCWA REGION

The basic elements of a State include a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a specific territory, the ability to protect that territory and the citizens therein, and an economy. A governance deficit, or lack of these basic elements, frequently leads to problems that can be difficult to surmount. These problems include an inability to maintain law and order, to support a functioning economy or to provide basic human needs for citizens, such as access to water and healthcare. States struggling with a governance deficit are unable to fulfill their capacity, which may lead to conflict relapses in States with recent, violent political struggles. An estimated 40 percent of Arab countries have had an episode of conflict within the last five years. As a result, governance deficit and conflict relapse are major concerns in the region today. Of the countries involved in the 2010 "Arab Spring," only Tunisia appears to have sustained a consistently functioning State.

Conflict relapse often follows a period of State failure, when a government goes beyond a mere deficit and essentially collapses. This can also occur when a newly installed government is attacked by a competing faction. In Libya, two competing governments each claim to be the legitimate government, but each only controls a small area of land outside the borders of its own principal cities. Four years after outside intervention ousted the government of dictator Muammar Gaddafi, there are two parliaments and two capital cities, no national police force or army to speak of, and massive civil unrest in most of the country. In Yemen, Houthi rebels overthrew the government in a violent coup in January 2015. Fighting between the Houthis and the government-in-exile, as well as with a patchwork of tribal militias, continues. Syria has been torn apart by civil war since 2012. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has taken advantage of the unrest in all of the

above-described countries to recruit members and to carry out suicide bombings, raids and mass public executions.

In contrast to State failure, other countries in the region suffer from inconsistency in their ability to prevent violence, manage the economy and provide social services. For example, Lebanon has struggled over the past decade to reign in its deficit, and corruption is rampant within the government. Bribes are common, and Lebanese finance ministers have been accused of embezzling funds through public works projects. The government has also struggled to respond to increased traffic from the country's border with Syria, which is overwhelming infrastructure.

While governance deficit and conflict relapse are a priority concern to this particular region, the United Nations has discussed conflict relapse and good governance practices for decades. Founded on the premise of saving future generations from devastating world conflicts, the United Nations created specific committees to deal with conflict and conflict prevention (Security Council, First Committee and Special Political and Decolonization Committee) in addition to adopting numerous resolutions and reports based on this topic.

A shift in the role of United Nations peacekeeping operations occurred in the early 1990s. Earlier peacekeeping missions were mainly focused on enforcing ceasefire agreements and dealing with conflicts—largely interstate—that had already broken out. More recent operations have focused on capacity-building, civil wars and the prevention of armed conflict. Furthermore, ESCWA, in particular the Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division (ECRI), has addressed these issues through forums, conferences and reports. Since 1999 the Global Forum on Reinventing Government has hosted annual conferences with varying themes centered on improving governance and public administration. In June of 2007, the United Nations, in conjunction with the Austrian Government, hosted the 7th Global Forum on Re-Inventing Government with an emphasis on Building Trust in Government. At the core of the discussions and reports produced by this forum was the emphasis on good governance practices and their link to the peace-building process. It was noted that the two concepts are inherently linked, and any future solutions to the issue of conflict relapse and peace-building must include a strengthening of good governance practices post-conflict.

In 2011, ESCWA issued a report on governance deficit and conflict relapse that built upon the previous work of the body and the United Nations as a whole. The report concluded that there are many interacting variables which can cause a governance deficit and that a deficit is only one stage of a cycle many countries are stuck within; the other two stages are conflict relapse and de-development. When analyzing



the connections within the cycle the report cautioned States to keep in mind the following factors: cultures of discrimination and impunity, socio-economic marginalization, unemployment, and an understanding of local and regional realities. The report also emphasized the effects of governance deficit on socio-economic and political development and discussed the sphere of influence conflict reaches by separating countries into three main categories: conflict countries, spill-over countries and indirectly affected countries. The breakdown of one government can send destabilization waves out across their region and the world: the disruption of delivery systems often results in shortages in food and cuts off the supply of basic services; refugees flow across borders, disrupting local economies and challenging governments outside the conflict State; exports of vital resources can be disrupted causing shortages in far-reaching areas of the globe and depleting the State's access to the financial support trade provides.

More recently within the ESCWA region, the Arab Administrative Development Organization (ARADO) has hosted conferences focusing on the issues of conflict and governance within the region. At their fourteenth annual conference, held in Cairo, attendees focused on building resilience to global risks that affect Arab countries. This conference was attended by ESCWA, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in addition to representatives from other international organizations, government officials and researchers. Within the conference, ESCWA hosted a discussion identifying regional risk characteristics, governance, and public sector reforms in conflict, crisis and transitions. The presentation noted that ESCWA States were, on average, at a higher risk for government deficits than the global average; in some arenas the risk assessment is alarmingly high. In 2015, ARADO organized its first Arab Conference on Administrative Reform and Development. As with the 2011 report on this issue, discussions at the conference noted the importance of the impact of a conflict not only in the country in which it occurred but on one's neighbors and other countries within the sphere of influence. It was concluded that governance and institutional reform are vital components to promote stability and to prevent conflict and conflict relapses.

While much work has been done in the past by various bodies of the United Nations and ESCWA, governance deficit and conflict relapse continue to be a pressing issue within the region today. States must evaluate how conflict has changed in the region, including the role non-state actors have played in conflict relapse. ESCWA Members must now develop new and changing solutions to fit this evolving and complicated issue. Moreover, States must evaluate the effectiveness of past documents and discussions and decide how best to work together within the region to prevent governance deficits and, in turn, conflict relapses. Moving forward, ESCWA Members will need to focus on how to best establish good governance practices post-conflict to prevent further conflict within the region. Strong state institutions and institutionalization can help eliminate governance deficits and, as a result, limit conflict relapses. Capacity-building measures such as better-trained police officers and more effective delivery of social services can help increase support for governments. Additionally, cooperation between neighboring states, political allies and international organizations can help to strengthen governance processes and institutionalization to safeguard against conflict relapse.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- How can ESCWA's Member States cooperate to strengthen capacity for governance?
- What steps could ESCWA's Member States take to aid each other in recovering more effectively from lapses in governance?
- What good practices should ESCWA Member States adopt or consider for responding to conflicts?
- What role can the United Nations agencies play in supporting good governance in the region?

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IMPACT OF ICT ON ARAB YOUTH: EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Youth is a period of transition from dependence to independence. The 2007 World Development Report outlines five major life transitions that generally occur between 18 and 30: completing school, going to work, growing up healthy, forming families and exercising citizenship. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have greater than 50 percent of their total population under the age of 30. Consequently, the status and well-being of youth is a critical marker of and important contributor to development in the region. Despite a growing interest in this demographic, ESCWA Member States face a number of challenges in supporting youth development. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2010, these issues have come into a



sharper focus. States across the region have made tackling youth unemployment and education priorities.

Considering a range of options, many States see information and communication technology (ICT) as a crucial element of national and regional strategy to support youth development. Over the past decades, ICT has created many new opportunities for youth, allowing them to foster new skills with online learning, to use social media to build social movements and to participate in civic life. ICT also plays an important role in one of the biggest issues Arab youth face today: unemployment. By creating opportunities for new types of work and by enabling youth in MENA to work for organizations around the world, youth underemployment and unemployment has seen a tangible decline.

The United Nations has long considered the role ICT plays in youth development, from empowering civic engagement and information sharing to sharing culture and broadening horizons. Youth populations with growing access to ICT have shown to be more empowered and engaged. Since July 2002, ESCWA and the International Labour Organization have hosted an annual joint forum that researches the socio-economic impact of ICT on development in MENA countries. ESCWA has worked on measuring and assessing the benefits of ICT to bring infrastructure to communities across the region, as well as to link Arab youth to the global economy. Because of advances in ICT that enable increasingly decentralized work, Arab youth are now competing for jobs with youth worldwide that have access to the same information and education.

Following the World Summit on Information Society recommendations in 2003 and 2005, many Arab States elaborated State ICT strategies, or e-strategies, aimed at leveraging the potential of ICT for social benefits and economic growth. While some States in the region have put significant effort toward creating an environment that encourages ICT development, there remains a gap in the support and financing needed to develop young entrepreneurs and small enterprises in this sector.

In 2013, the ICT division of ESCWA held the Capacity Building Workshop on Measuring the Use and Impact of ICT on Social and Economic Development in Tunisia. They analyzed three possible avenues for improving the measurement of use and impact of ICT in Arab countries. The first was to increase awareness of existing resources in order to improve data collection of indicators based on statistical surveys. The indicators included the use of ICT in education, government, and businesses, as well as ICT infrastructure and access; these levels then measure how far States must go to improve or build ICT and access. The second avenue explored the improved measurement of ICT use and its impact on a given domain, or sector: individual, educational, governmental, etc. National plans or consistent application of a plan with ICT creates the easiest measurement across domains. The last avenue suggested the importance of using opinion surveys to identify and analyze the effectiveness of ICT use and implementation. This creates a more measurable and nuanced set of data and helps outline and define ICT goals.

While the potential for growth exists, increased efforts are needed to scale up ICT initiatives, both in terms of number and impact, an effort which will require the private sector, governments and NGOs to contribute to the necessary structural and organizational transformation. These initiatives might include e-learning tools, the development

of economic policies in support of entrepreneurial ventures and financing smaller, job-creating enterprises. Incentivizing this sort of cross-sector or multi-sector work may be one area for discussion among ESCWA Members. E-tools in particular can be used to broaden the educational or employment possibilities for youth in the region, and ESCWA looks to its Member States to make this a reality. In order to prompt meaningful change, MENA States and the Commission must be able to measure the utility of ICT, the actual educational outcomes from these tools and the impact on individual State's capacities. More specific information gathering must involve greater collaboration and cooperation between States themselves, as well as States and their respective private sectors, NGOs and other entities. Increased statistics, including use, implementation and access to ICT, will also rely on further integration of communication techniques between MENA States; diplomatic cooperation remains a key to success.

The creation of coordinated development policies aimed at nurturing entrepreneurial opportunities offers Arab youth the tools and educational opportunities to gain employment and be a part of sustainable economic growth. According to the recommendations laid out in the Commission's 2013 study, "personal enablers," or those acting in advisory roles, would be able to direct young entrepreneurs in their professional development and economic plans. The strengthening of these enablers and their networks would help establish a framework to support Arab youth start-ups. ESCWA Members may also want to consider how to encourage financial or business enablers to invest in Arab youth development through micro-financing and loans or professional services, which would allow youth to use their skills to make meaningful economic and social contributions.

Another issue for the Commission to consider is how the ICT sector has the potential not only to expand both employment and educational opportunities, but also to engage and empower marginalized groups. These marginalized groups, including women and ethnic or religious minorities, have a growing ability to reach out to others and to broadcast their message both regionally and globally. A 2013 ESCWA report regarding the impact of ICT on Arab youth found that unemployment for young women in MENA countries was at nearly 40 percent—double that of young men and among the highest levels of unemployment in the world. With gender parity in education improving throughout the MENA region, and with a rise in recognition of the plight of minorities like the Kurds, Member States could leverage the potential for ICT-based tools to promote equality and reduce or eliminate socioeconomic disparities among the genders and ethnicities.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- What efforts should ESCWA undertake to promote greater access to ICT in the region?
- How can Member States adapt education systems to prepare youth for the knowledge-based, globalized economy? Can ICT be used to support learning opportunities?
- How can Member States encourage more ICT-based employment opportunities, particularly for youth?
- How might Member States use ICT to address socioeconomic disparities?



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