

## CHAPTER 12

# Capacity Development for Changing Mindsets in the Arab Region – Governance Institutes Forum for Training in the Middle East and North Africa (GIFT-MENA)

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The conclusion of the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, which aimed to review the status of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across the Arab world, underlined that the achievement of the Goals by 2030 is improbable, particularly given the chronic and deeply rooted development challenges, institutional deficiencies, lack of policy coherence and widespread conflicts that the region is facing. Empowering people and working towards more inclusiveness and equality were ascertained as pathways to peace, development, and the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>142</sup>

In light of these challenges, realizing the SDGs in the Arab region was largely made dependent on the readiness and capacity of governments to keep pace with the changes ahead and reap the benefits of opportunities arising from the changing nature of work and firms, from the potential for economic and trade integration, from climate action and, most importantly for fragile and conflict-affected settings, from the renegotiation of social contracts during peace agreements or following unrest.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put further pressure on governments to address unforeseen challenges and an overhauled global working environment. Government were called upon to shift their immediate attention to overarching structural and governance deficiencies and poor citizen-centric frameworks while providing national responses to a global threat. With the pandemic, States are now further expected to frame their policy action within broader and overarching policy considerations, more particularly social protection, economic resilience and recovery, as well as the development of institutional response structures that are able to break existing silos and drive simultaneous actions on several policy tracks. For that, the Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development can chart the way.

The present chapter draws on the challenges specific to the Arab region, and in line with the recommendations outlined at the 18th and 19th sessions of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, reflects on the region's way forward, particularly in what relates to the competencies and skills required to overcome the old and emerging challenges, and to progress towards achieving Agenda 2030.

— 1 —

## Setting the Scene: why what works in some regions may not work in the Arab region\*

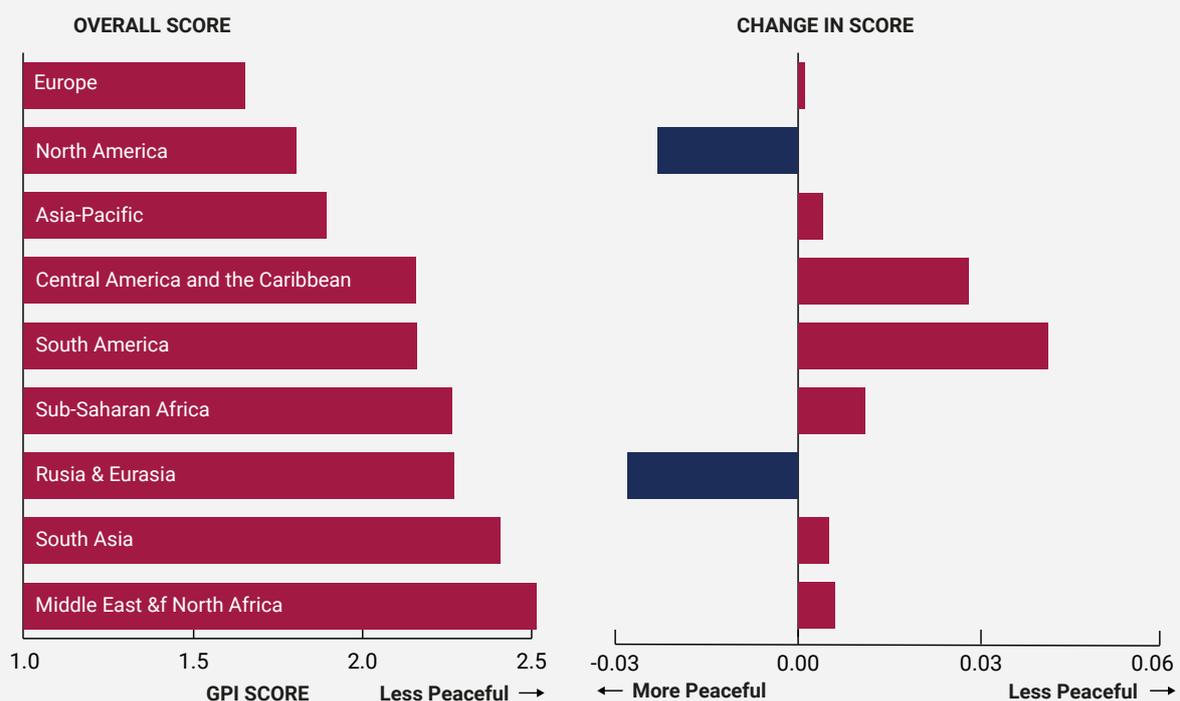
### The peace gap: how can the world’s least peaceful region achieve sustainable development?

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is most exposed and prone to conflicts. It has experienced, since World War II, more frequent and intense conflicts than any other part of the world. Between 1946 and 2015, 12 out of 59 conflicts in MENA have lasted more than 8 years, and, in about half of these episodes, the ensuing peace lasted less than 10 years.<sup>143</sup> The intensity and recurrence of the region’s conflicts have rendered them particularly challenging to overcome, which has led to massive economic and social losses, ranging from deep recessions to rising inflation, fiscal deficits, strong

economic inequalities and weak financial, public and regulatory institutions. Conflicts in the MENA region cost much more than the average of all types of conflicts worldwide, thereby leading to crippled state capacities and to a vicious cycle of instability and unrest. This renders the advancement of the 2030 Agenda much more complex.

Today, the MENA region remains the least peaceful region in the world (figure 12.1) on the Global Peace Index, despite some marginal improvements since 2018 related to reductions in population displacement, political terror, terrorism, deaths resulting from internal and external armed conflicts, military spending, and armed services personnel.<sup>144</sup>

Figure.12.1: Regional Global Peace Index (GPI) Results, 2019



Source: Institute for Economic and Peace (IEP)

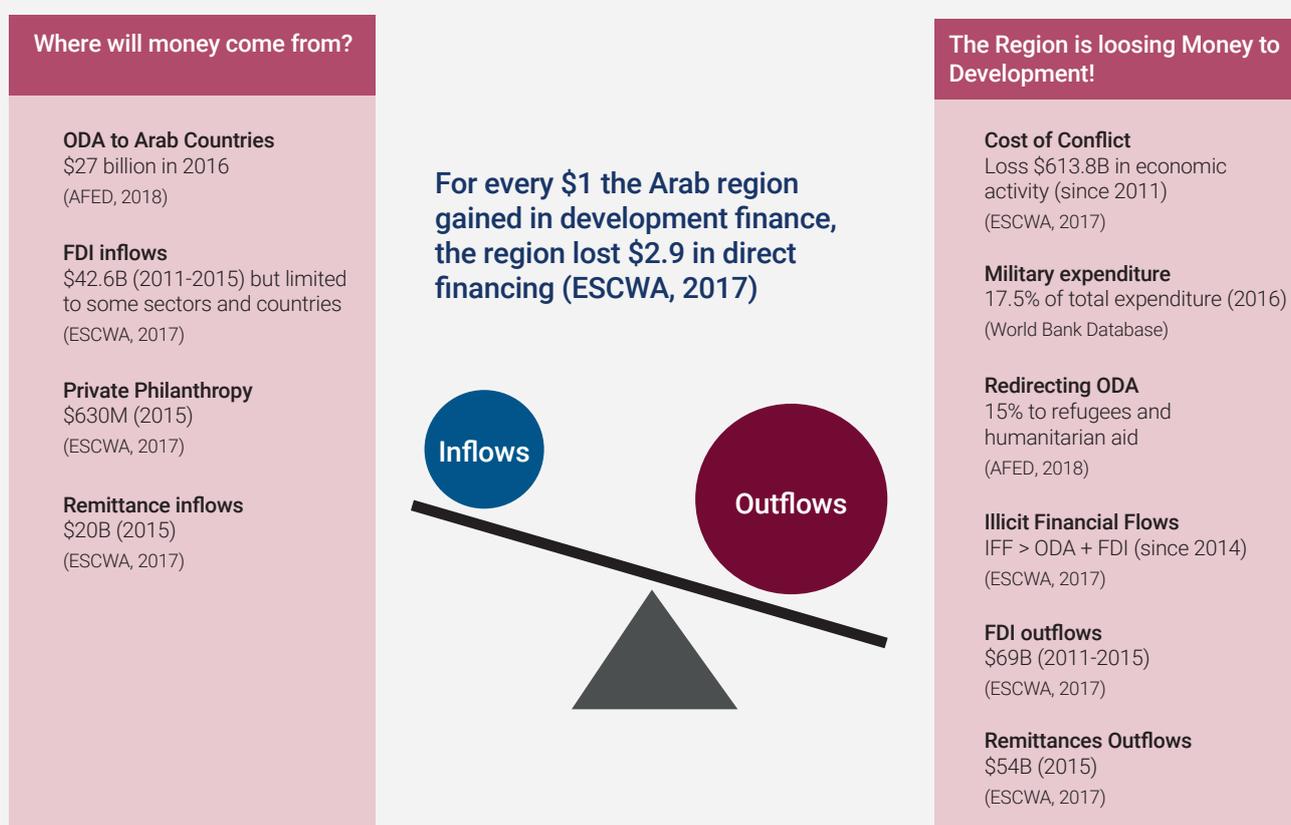
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## The financing gap

Besides the direct and indirect impact of conflicts, sustaining development funding is another major challenge weighting upon the achievement of Agenda 2030 in the Arab world (figure 12.2). In 2017 and well before the outbreak of the pandemic, it was already estimated that for every US\$1 gained in development financing, US\$2.9 are lost in direct financing that could have been directed towards financing the region's

development priorities.<sup>145</sup> Consequently, while the economic and social toll of persistent and recurrent instability and conflict continues to rise, the financing gap for the achievement of Agenda 2030 in the region keeps widening. Billions of dollars are lost every year to conflicts, illicit financial flows, corruption, money laundering and tax evasion. These resources have and continue to be invested in funding wars, crimes, and lavish lifestyles rather than socioeconomic well-being.

**Figure 12.2: Financing Development in the Arab World, 2018**



Source: Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, Lebanon

### The public finance gap

As the United Nations Secretary-General Guterres has reiterated, efforts should “continue to support developing countries in creating conditions for mobilizing domestic resources, including tax reform and other good governance measures”.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, Arab countries’ capacity to mobilize domestic resources towards such levers continues to be crippled. Fiscal and financial frameworks continue to be, in many cases, regressive and unable to generate a sufficient pool of revenue to finance the resumption of public services or local development. Moreover, national financial resources continue to be drained by military spending and regressive fuel subsidies.

The principle of allocation of maximum available resources to development is challenged by high military spending: 25% of central government expenditures (2015) are allocated to security and military spending compared to a global average of around 8%. Along the same lines, about half of total energy subsidies belong to the MENA region. Pre-tax energy subsidies are equivalent to 8.6% of regional GDP or 22% of government revenues (IMF, 2011) (figure 12.3), and most of these subsidies tend to be regressive or captured by an economically entrenched elite.<sup>147</sup> The IMF estimated in 2018 that for each 1% point of GDP in spending on energy subsidies that is redirected to infrastructure spending, the region has the potential to increase its GDP by 2% points and create ½ million new jobs.<sup>148</sup>

**Figure 12.3: Pre-Tax Energy Subsidies as % of GDP in 2011**



Source: IMF, 2013

Despite tremendous efforts, public procurement regulations and practices in the region require modernization and reform, particularly in light of three overarching objectives: (1) value-for-money optimization; (2) the promotion of equitable socioeconomic development and innovation through Medium and Small Enterprises (MSEs); and (3) the inclusion of sustainable and environmental criteria in line with the UNEP One Planet framework. The potential of public procurement, a lever to achieve progress towards the achievement of Agenda 2030, continues to be untapped.

*External foreign financing, such as Official Development Assistance (ODA), continues to shift towards humanitarian interventions, security-related expenditures, and refugee costs in host countries, often at the expense of development.*

Arab development co-operation activities are concentrated in the economic infrastructure sectors, such as transport and storage, energy, industry, mining and construction, which accounted for 43% of their ODA between 2011 and 2015; the OECD’s DAC members place greater emphasis on social infrastructure and services (57% of their ODA).<sup>149</sup>

When it comes to private financing, the region has gradually become a “net exporter of capital”. For every dollar received in 2017, US\$1.8 are reinvested abroad.<sup>150</sup> Even oil-rich countries, which are usually the recipients of high levels of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), are suffering from a decrease in the levels of FDI attracted of around 1.2% of GDP, compared with 2.3% worldwide.<sup>151</sup> And when available, the vast majority of investment is short-term oriented. Most FDIs are directed towards low technology sectors that generate few new jobs. Finally, complex financing mechanisms such as Green Financing still represent only a small fraction of overall financial activity in private markets and are yet to be mainstreamed into the business models of the financial industry.

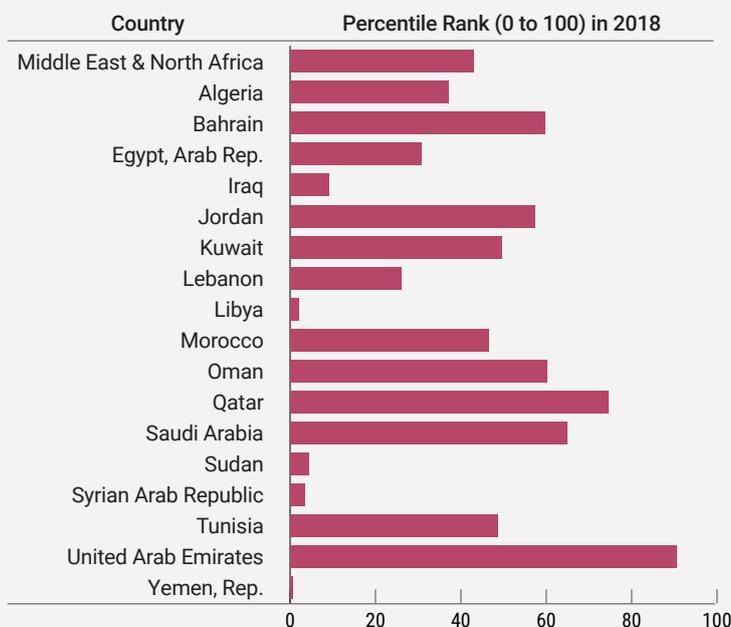
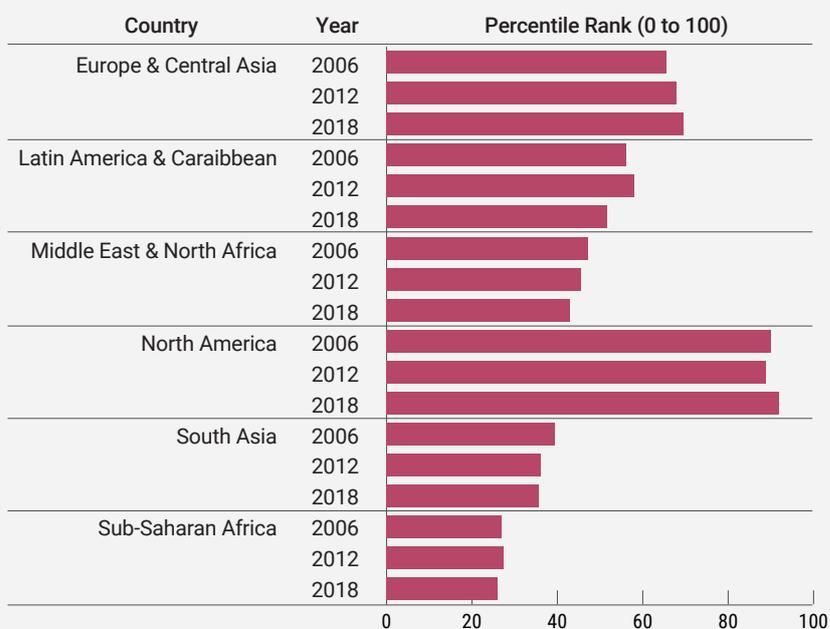
### The social services gap

Today, the MENA region is tagged for its inability to generate growth and a persistent tendency to disappoint. Although most Arab governments commit a significant share of their budgets to education and health, public services are still of low quality across the MENA region (figure 12.4).

When public services are failing everyone, the rich usually opt out of the system, instead of striving to enhance it. Such situations often lead to increased flight of capital, tax evasion and the proliferation of illicit financial flows. These shortfalls persist for two reasons: first, because there is no major political gain from pursuing sustainable policies; second, because the public administration may lack the capacity, incentives, or competencies to convert policy plans into effective actions.

As a consequence, governments across the MENA region are continuing to favour spending on infrastructure and subsidies, notably in countries coming out of conflict or facing high levels of fragility. History and experience have taught us, however, that rebuilding public administration is one of the “most complex and difficult aspects of restoring governance and rebuilding war-torn societies”<sup>153</sup> and that the transition process can take 15 to 30 years. In this context, the hope, brought by Agenda 2030, may dwindle before the stark contrast between the transformative vision and aspirations set forth by this Agenda, and the current state of conflict, violent political forces, occupation and exclusion across the Arab world.

Figure 12.4: Government Effectiveness in MENA, 2019.<sup>152</sup>



## 2

## The COVID-19 pandemic: revealing and amplifying structural deficiencies

Across the developing world and in the Arab world in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has both revealed and drastically amplified structural deficiencies as well as the SDG financing gap. With IMF estimating the global downturn as the worst since the great depression, between 400-700 million more people would be living below the poverty line (both extreme and middle-income poverty line).<sup>154</sup> The pandemic is currently undoing decades of progress on the MDGs and the SDGs, fueling further socioeconomic resentment, and destabilizing already-fragile States. With an original US\$ 2 trillion financing gap, developing economies have just lost approximately US\$ 90 billion in retracted investments due to the crisis.<sup>155</sup> In the Arab region, protracted conflicts are expected to worsen as the forces of exclusion (discrimination, geography, governance, socioeconomic and fragility) remain unaddressed.<sup>156</sup>

GDP is expected to contract by 5.7%, with the worst economic forecast of the past 50 years. Poverty is estimated to swell by 12.4%, affecting more than 115 million people in total. The situation is particularly desperate for migrants and people who need humanitarian assistance, with a 1.7 billion USD financing gap to address the impact and risks of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable alone.<sup>157</sup> This situation risks amplifying conflicts, as resources dwindle and the capacity of governments to respond to the crisis remains crippled by inefficiency and the inability to mobilize domestic resources.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, the crisis also offers the opportunity to “build back better”, achieve political consensus, leverage State legitimacy, and boost economic recovery.<sup>159</sup>

### A land of opportunities despite all

Despite this grim outlook, the MENA region still holds considerable potential for a successful transition towards sustainable governance. It enjoys a privileged geographic location with access to large markets, a young and increasingly educated population (half are under 30 years) and comparative advantages in several sectors including manufacturing, renewable energies, and tourism. Financing opportunities are also abundant. The region is the largest provider of ODA outside of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Arab ODA represented 47% of what non-DAC providers reported disbursing between 2011 and 2015. ODA provided by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar in 2015 surpassed the United Nations target of 0.7% for the ratio of ODA to gross national income.<sup>160</sup>

When it comes to official commitments to the SDGs, the MENA region is on board with Agenda 2030 since more than half of the Arab countries (16 countries) have fully engaged in the realization of the Agenda and presented, by 2020, multiple Voluntary National Reviews. This collaborative exercise has helped to bring about

change in planning practices, in institutional coordination and in the identification of data gaps. It is also a promising tool to start integrating SDGs implementation in national budgets. Arab countries also provided swift and early responses to the COVID-19 outbreak, keeping a relatively low number of Covid-related deaths to population, far below the rates experienced in some European and Asian countries.

However, as highlighted during the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, progress made in the Arab region after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda is still far, both qualitatively and quantitatively, from reaching the desired objectives and targets. Even if all conflicts and wars were to end immediately, the region would struggle with achieving the SDGs by 2030. Indeed, “a change in the mindset and culture of designing development strategies, policies, and plans, and their monitoring and assessment is essential if Arab countries are to achieve the SDGs and address climate change concerns”<sup>161</sup>.

Previous research has underlined that the promotion of inclusiveness will be central in closing the political governance gap and establishing sustainable peace, and that it would be a key pulling factor for the lever pertaining to political stability and consensus building.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, such efforts need to be accompanied by efforts to change the perception that governance reform is a mere tool to reduce expenditures rather than a means to solve complex policy challenges.<sup>163</sup> To do so, new social contracts and the curtailment of political exclusiveness can be achieved through public sector recruitment reform.

In contexts where public sector leaders struggle with competing priorities and are challenged by security threats and at a time when policy decisions are more than ever driven by performance and value for money, transforming the civil service into a catalyst for the achievement of a balanced, equitable and sustainable society founded on the principles of social justice has become a necessity. Questioning the status-quo would require addressing a series of questions around which competencies are most relevant to contexts so disparate, changing and challenging. These competencies include the needed skill sets that would allow the countries to navigate uncertainty and the public administration’s ability to attract and retain needed talents and competencies, particularly in the context of the global pandemic. Focusing on skills is an incremental approach that is anchored in a medium-term vision for reform, rather than in a “quick fix” approach. This prospective exercise around skills needed in government must also cater for the fact that, by 2030, 65% of graduates will have jobs that don’t currently exist.<sup>164</sup>

## 3

## The demand for skills in public service

At its 2019 session, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration underlined that new sets of capacities and skills are required to effectively implement the SDGs,<sup>165</sup> albeit the fact that traditional competencies remain relevant. The Committee pointed in particular to the enabling role that critical, complexity, futures and design thinking will play in addition to deliberative skills and emotional intelligence. The Committee also highlighted the appropriate use of frontier technologies in delivering innovative public services and achieving the SDGs. It acknowledged that core human values remain the backbone for competencies to deliver an Agenda that leaves no one behind. These skills were derived from the 11 principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development developed by the UN CEPA (figure 12.5) as a novel framework to help institutions think critically about the strategies that can help them best achieve the SDGs, taking into account different governance structures, national realities, capacities and levels of development.

The demand for advanced cognitive and socio-behavioral skills is therefore increasing but so too is the demand for compassion, respect of diversity, respect of human dignity and the right to choose. Most of all, there is strong demand for agility, which is defined as the ability to respond to unexpected circumstances and to unlearn and relearn quickly. Along the same line, the COVID-19 pandemic has reasserted the need for empathy, solidarity, respect for human dignity, and the ability to generate and analyze high-quality disaggregated data for decision-making and rapid policy action.

Such skill set would indirectly contribute to conflict prevention particularly since, where preventive action is successful, the average net savings are close to US\$5 billion per year. In the most optimistic scenario, the net savings would be of almost US\$70 billion per year (Mueller 2017).

The foundational skill set that would undoubtedly need to be promoted is **socio-behavioral** as it would contribute to transforming public administrations into hubs of consensus building. The second skill set, deriving from **design thinking**, is related to the capacity of civil servants to promote transparency through policy-design and particularly through the analysis of high-quality disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data that can then be used for evidence-based policy-making. This gains further importance, as statistical bodies in conflict-affected states require particular attention and urgent capacity development given the destruction of documentation and the means of gathering information. This is especially relevant since promoting data transparency is expected to reduce sovereign risk premia in MENA by about 15%<sup>166</sup>.

As for the mobilization of domestic resources, **Public Financial Management (PFM) skills** are also seen as catalysts for the resumption of public administration governance and service delivery, especially in fragile and post conflict environments. The rift created by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought further to the forefront the importance of careful financial policy planning, the mobilization of domestic resources, the reduction of dependency relations, and the centrality of tax reform towards more progressivity and redistribution. They are a fundamental component in the achievement of the SDGs, particularly Goals 16 and 17. Indeed, PFM training, particularly on issues such as tax auditing, revenue management, combatting tax evasion, public procurement, etc. will enhance the core skills needed to increase revenues, optimize expenditures, and fund and resume social services that are often discontinued or missing in conflict-ridden environments.

Rounding out these skills is **training in prevention work**, which is expected to interact with security, diplomacy, and mediation, among others. This type of training needs to foster collective approaches to risk assessment and management and build local capacities and commitment to collectively understand and closely monitor the conditions that could contribute to fragility. It is expected to mainstream citizen engagement and empower women and youth to enhance their participation in policymaking.<sup>167</sup>

### As the nature of work is changing and the competencies are evolving, what can governments do?

Human Resources frameworks pertaining to the staffing, training, and career plans of civil servants in line with the competencies outlined for the achievement of the Principles of Effective Governance are central to the streamlining of the SDGs. In conflict and fragile contexts, a particular set of reforms can act as “entry points” for all the others: (1) recruitment reform; (2) training for transparency-oriented design thinking and (3) PFM-related competencies.

Indeed, HR frameworks can simultaneously address many, if not all of the above, levers. Several overarching recommendations have come to reinforce these assertions. The 2019 World Development Report that looks at how the nature of work is changing, points out important skills readjustments happening increasingly outside of compulsory education and formal employment. Skills development is therefore becoming a matter of lifelong learning. The report acknowledges that “adult learning is an important channel for readjusting skills to fit in the future of work, but it would benefit from a serious design rethink”<sup>168</sup>.

**Figure 12.5: Principles and Strategies of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development, adapted from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, E/2018/44-E/C.16/2018/8**

EFFECTIVENESS				
COMPETENCE		SOUND POLICY-MAKING		COLLABORATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of a professional public sector workforce</li> <li>Strategic human resources management</li> <li>Leadership development, training of civil servants</li> <li>Performance management</li> <li>Results-based management</li> <li>Financial management and control</li> <li>Efficient and fair revenue administration</li> <li>Investment in e-government</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic planning and foresight</li> <li>Regulatory impact analysis</li> <li>Promotion of coherent policymaking</li> <li>Strengthening national statistical systems</li> <li>Monitoring &amp; evaluation systems</li> <li>Science-policy interface</li> <li>Risk management frameworks</li> <li>Data sharing</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centre of government coordination under Head of State / Government</li> <li>Collaboration, coordination, integration, dialogue across levels of government, functional areas</li> <li>Raising awareness on SDGs</li> <li>Network-based governance</li> <li>Multi-stakeholder partnerships</li> </ul>

ACCOUNTABILITY		
ACCOUNTABILITY	TRANSPARENCY	INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of anti-corruption policies, practices and bodies</li> <li>Codes of conduct for public officials</li> <li>Competitive public procurement</li> <li>Elimination of bribery, including trading</li> <li>Conflict of interest policies</li> <li>Whistle-blower protection</li> <li>Provision of adequate remuneration and equitable pay scales for public servants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactive disclosure of information</li> <li>Budget transparency</li> <li>Open government data</li> <li>Registries of beneficial ownership</li> <li>Lobby registries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of the independence of regulatory agencies</li> <li>Arrangements for review of administrative decisions by courts or other bodies</li> <li>Independent audit</li> <li>Respect for legality</li> </ul>

INCLUSIVENESS				
LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND	NON-DISCRIMINATION	PARTICIPATION	SUBSIDIARY	INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of equitable fiscal and monetary policy</li> <li>Promotion of social equity</li> <li>Data disaggregation</li> <li>Systematic follow-up and review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of public sector workforce diversity</li> <li>Prohibition of discrimination in public service delivery</li> <li>Multilingual service delivery</li> <li>Accessibility standards</li> <li>Cultural audit of institutions</li> <li>Universal birth registration</li> <li>Gender-responsive budgeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free and fair elections</li> <li>Regulatory process of public consultations</li> <li>Multi-stakeholder forums</li> <li>Participatory budgeting</li> <li>Community-driven development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fiscal federalism</li> <li>Strengthening urban governance</li> <li>Strengthening municipal finance and local finance systems</li> <li>Enhancement of local capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multilevel governance</li> <li>Sustainable development impact assessment</li> <li>Long-term territorial planning and spatial development</li> <li>Ecosystem management</li> </ul>

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, E/2018/44-E/C.16/2018/8

In order to streamline capacity building and lifelong learning in line with these recommendations, it is essential to rework education curricula for the public sector workforce around the emerging skillsets (critical, design, complexity and futures thinking and emotional intelligence) and to make the SDGs part of the curricula of national schools of public administration. Civil service schools (also known as Schools of Government) are partners for change in this endeavour. However, they need to be empowered, particularly those operating in conflict-affected areas where resources are increasingly restrained and in line with the above framework pertaining to the exit from conflict and fragility. The case of the GIFT-MENA network, in this regard, is quite indicative.

### The GIFT-MENA Network

The Arab region has witnessed the establishment of a key initiative for the development of capacities across the region in public governance and financial management. The Governance Institutes Forum for Training in the Middle East and North Africa (GIFT-MENA) network has worked in this direction with the various countries of the region (see Table 12.1). The survey conducted in 2018 by the network among its members aimed to gauge their understanding of and implication in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The results were appealing. In 87% of the cases surveyed, institutions had already integrated the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs into their existing training programs, such as a focus on SDGs topics like poverty, gender, environment, and accountability.

Still, in around 70% of the cases, training on the SDGs is delivered by international organizations, because these schools

lacked enough capacities to design training on concepts and standards. They were not exposed enough to experiences and best practices and especially lacked technical knowledge on how to integrate the SDGs. Financial resources to adapt their curricula to the new paradigm or to develop new material were scarce and expertise, particularly the availability of Arab-speaking expert trainers was found to be a limiting factor.

When asked about ways in which they were planning or would like to integrate the SDGs into training provided to civil servants, 56% of institutions answered they would integrate the SDGs into only some of the existing training programs on related topics and for specific target audiences while 38% expressed their preference for integrating the SDGs into all existing training programs for civil servants. Half of them said they would privilege training-of-trainers' programs. Around 44% pointed to a preference for developing new training programs for specific target audiences (in specific parts or units of public administration), while 44% opted for the development of a standalone program for all entry-level, mid-career and/or senior officials.

Finally, when asked about the priority themes to include in any SDG related training, schools of government prioritized human resources management; public policy and the SDGs; governance and conflicts; gender equality; ethics in public policy; and public budgeting and financial management. In the survey, schools also expressed a high preference and demand for curricula in the Arabic language.

**Table 12.1: About the GIFT-MENA network**

Created in 2006, GIFT-MENA is a voluntary network that convenes more than 60 civil service training schools and institutes in the MENA region from 20 countries.

It worked to empower schools of government by:

1. Bringing them to the front lines of State transformation.
2. Enhancing their strategic, institutional, and operational capacities to become active contributors to the agenda of reforms.
3. Promoting the co-production of knowledge to shape policies and especially policies affecting public money management and HR policies influencing meritocratic and inclusive recruitment; and
4. Finally, by creating opportunities to network among peers and to build partnerships at the local, intra-Arab and international levels.

The Marrakech Call:

In 2018, on the occasion of the UN Public Service Forum in Marrakech, members of the GIFT-MENA network launched a call to:

- Design a roadmap to support willing institutions in the region with methodologies, and advice, to help them embrace the SDGs and redesign their practices; and
- Consolidate a network of practitioners and resources managers for the implementation of the various components of the 2030 Agenda.

Based on the survey results, member schools proposed national initiatives to integrate the SDGs into training programs and learning activities, including the programs aimed at building the capacities of trainers and experts to enhance their abilities to handle issues related to Agenda 2030. They proposed actions aimed at fostering coordination and collaboration between training schools to exchange practices and experiences in the field of sustainable development. In this regard, they pointed to the need to reinforce the capacities of networks such as the GIFT-MENA to serve as platforms of dialogue.

The survey also highlighted the importance of providing technical assistance to training schools on existing modalities for integrating the SDGs in training curricula; and the need to develop social media strategies that aim to improve access to information on the 2030 Agenda. Today, the challenge resides in the capacities of the State to make and sustain the case of Schools of Government at the policy level so that schools and institutes are in the driving seats of this transformation and granted needed resources to perform, bringing people together from central and local authorities.

Answers will need to be provided to the main questions that will shape the road ahead. Namely whether schools of government are willing to integrate in their curricula training programs that seek the development of the competencies needed to achieve the SDGs. And in doing so whether they would embrace co-construction and co-design as well as new models of partnerships. How will impact be measured and linked to the progress of the SDGs and from where will the guidance come from are essential questions. Other questions relate to the institutional dimensions of governance namely to prevailing outdated recruitment legislations, cronyism, and bloating. Questions arise to where will positive triggers for workforce development come from, and whether schools of governance may have a more strategic policy role in the development of new recruitment frameworks that are designed to cater for particular contexts, notably in conflict-ridden and fragile settings. Issues related to allocation of budgets would also need to be addressed.

## 4

## Conclusion and recommendations

The 2030 Agenda requires governments to foster an environment where meritocracy is the rule and growth is inclusive and equal. It would mean governments achieving far-reaching transformation in the way societies produce, spend and distribute their resources and in their ability to listen to the voice of the Arab youth, to prioritize their needs and to offer them opportunities to stay or to return to their home countries. Simultaneously, a professional, capable, and responsive public service is seen as a fundamental driver of citizens' trust in public institutions.

Therefore, achieving substantive progress towards the SDGs across the Arab world has to start by addressing the political gap, the socio-economic gap and the institutional gap by tapping into the region's financial, economic and human capital. This requires creating mechanisms to (1) end wars and conflicts; (2) accelerate inclusive models of growth aimed at reducing inequalities and thus preventing future cycles of violence; and (3) restore the legitimacy of the state on the basis of new skills sets and of a renewed social contract based on trust and respect of human rights, thereby creating a virtual cycle that can pave the way for seeing the promises of the 2030 Agenda materialize.

In light of the above, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Addressing the emergency relief deficit particularly in relation to healthcare and the need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.** This would entail nationwide needs assessments for the recruitment of trained essential and healthcare workers into the public workforce on either contractual or permanent bases. Such recruitment would be accompanied by integrated health services, prevention measures, and mechanisms to address displaced people and migrants. This would also require investment in capacities for coordination, prioritization, and agility.
2. **Promoting inclusiveness and diversity at all levels as a key lever for both emergency response and the building of strong and resilient institutions.** Greater investments in education and training could serve as an entry point. Indeed, increasing funding for education and seeking to reform and modernize the educational systems in the Arab world could act as a lever for social cohesion, particularly in light of both the plea of the refugees and migrants as well as in light of the poverty that has ensued due to the pandemic.
3. **Designing and implementing a competencies-building framework for women,** in order for them to be "equal contributors in society through bridging the gender divide,"<sup>169</sup> in particular after the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the major role and potential of women in MENA societies and across the globe. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that nations led by women (Germany, New Zealand, etc.) fared significantly better than those led by men and that over 70% of frontline healthcare workers are women.
4. **Implementing incremental political reform for resilience-building in fragile and conflict affected settings.** This will include addressing inequalities, shifting resources towards critical areas for achieving the SDGs, including structural transformation, economic diversification, social protection and tapping into the potential of the youth. This consequently includes promoting competencies particularly in policy design and design thinking, data, and datasets analysis for policymaking, as well as cognitive and behavioral skills pertaining to tolerance and empathy.

5. **Pulling, through training on Public Financial Management, the levers of economic and financial recovery**, particularly in the following action areas: Public-Private Partnerships, the green and innovative economy, economic diversification, public procurement, budgeting for the SDGs, tax collection, and revenues management. This will inevitably be highly contingent on the will of States to proceed in related reforms.
6. **Consolidating underlying structural issues, such as the importance of transparency in the use of public funds, digitization, and open data.**
7. **Investing in technology**, smart automation and digitization to effectively transform public administration work, drive transparent and informed decision-making and reduce malpractice in government payments and tax receipts, e-procurement, fraudulent payments, tax evasion and monitoring international and domestic markets for price comparisons and timely actions that ensure efficiency, transparency, and accountability.
8. **Harnessing the potential offered by tech lies with people and their skills, more than in the technology itself.** Schools of public administration have a key role to play in accompanying the digital transformation, anticipating the adjustment needed in competencies, skills and working practices. The investment in technology will require a commensurate investment in people. But this shall also come with training on the ethical and privacy aspects of technology so that individuals can understand and correct errors and bias coming from artificial intelligence.
9. **Emphasizing the need to pursue lifelong learning:** As we are faced with accelerated change and risk, such as the ones brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic, schools of public administration will need to find ways and approaches to keep civil servants motivated to learn throughout their careers and always be prepared and open to change and adaptation.
10. **Preserving the lifeline provided by Schools of Government in remaining knowledge and learning hubs, guardians of “institutional memory”, protectors of existing human talent**, and tap into their potential across the region as mobilizers of momentum for the creation of long-term training and capacity building frameworks that are anchored in the SDGs and that would nonetheless take the region's overarching considerations into account.
11. These **schools are increasingly recognized as “privileged” counterparts of development partners and technical assistance providers** as they offer spaces and platforms where international expertise can be adapted to national contexts, transferred, and sustained.
12. **Existing schools of governments and related networks can play a key role as conduits for skills and competencies' upscales as long as their already-existing needs are met.** Key insight from the Global South and from fragile and conflict-affected settings referred to in this chapter points to priority requirements such as: 1. Training on new concepts and standards, 2. Exposure to experiences and best practices, 3. Technical knowledge on how to integrate the SDGs, 4. Financial resources for the development of such curricula, and 5. The establishment of a local and national pool of trainers and of language-sensitive training programs, in order for them to be able to integrate the SDGs in their training programs. In such contexts, the following training programs are of particular importance: human resources management, public policy and the SDGs, governance and conflicts, gender equality, ethics in public policy, and public budgeting and financial management.
13. **Creating a new framework of HR management and capacity development in HR management based on the above recommendations**, one that is able to accompany the transformation of work organization and the move towards more remote working and contingent forms of employment.

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