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الهيئة المركزية للوقاية من الرشوة
Instance Centrale de Prévention de la Corruption

High-Level Regional Consultation on
**Paths for Cooperation on Anti-Corruption and
Integrity in Arab Countries:**

Achievements, Challenges and Future Directions

Skhirat, Kingdom of Morocco,

9-20 November 2014

Report

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Overview

On 19-20 November 2014, the Kingdom of Morocco hosted a high level regional consultation on the "Future Directions for Cooperation on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries", organized in Skhirat by UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States in cooperation with the Central Authority for Corruption Prevention. This important event brought together more than 100 distinguished officials and activists specialized in this field from 13 Arab countries, including senior representatives of concerned agencies and ministries, parliamentarians, leaders from civil society and the business community and delegates of donor agencies and regional and international organizations. Participants also included practitioners from UNDP Country Offices Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia as well as the UNDP Global Anti-Corruption Initiative (GAIN), which has also provided support to the event.

Participants welcomed the results achieved in the framework of the first phase of UNDP's regional project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab Countries (ACIAC) and highlighted particular successes namely in terms of supporting the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption, developing related capacities within anti-corruption authorities, civil society and the business community, and promoting multi-stakeholder mechanisms for cooperation at the country level. They also explored opportunities and challenges for further cooperation, calling for a stronger focus on transparency and accountability in a manner that is conducive to sustainable development and human security across the region. In-depth discussion on related thematic issues that have been identified based on preliminary consultations in 2014 led to the formulation of specific recommendations for future directions and the role that UNDP may play in supporting such efforts, namely through a second phase of the ACIAC regional project. Those mainly revolved around the need to continue and deepen the implementation of the UNCAC, while promoting synergies with the Arab Convention against Corruption, in addition to the expansion of sector-specific work, especially in relation to sectors that deliver public services and those that generate major revenues for the State. Participants also highlighted the unique position of UNDP in fostering participatory platforms that brings in new stakeholders, namely businesspersons, the youth, women and parliamentarians, while enabling them together with the traditional anti-corruption stakeholders to promote linkages with the national development efforts.

Progress achieved on anti-corruption and integrity in Arab countries and challenges ahead

H.E. Mr. Anouar BEN KHELIFA, Minister of State in charge of Governance and Public Function in Tunisia chaired a key session on the first day of the Consultation where participants shared progress achieved in the fight against corruption and discussed related challenges. He began by stating that all Arab countries except Syria and Somalia ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and that concrete progress has been reached namely in the framework of the “Arab Anti-Corruption and Integrity Network” (ACINET) which now includes 45 governmental members from 17 Arab countries. 8 Arab countries have established specialized anti-corruption authorities, 6 have adopted national anti-corruption strategies while a number of other countries are currently developing such strategies. The Minister underlined the important role played by ACINET in the region which became a reference point for all active and concerned agencies in the region. He also reemphasized Tunisia’s commitment to further the Network’s objectives and support its members upon the transfer of the chairmanship from Lebanon to Tunisia.

Mr. Arkan EL SEBLANI, Manager of UNDP-ACIAC presented the achievements of the Project between 2011 and 2014 and the lessons learned from this period, which included 18 Arab countries and a focus on 8 of them. The Project managed to build the capacities of leaders and officials from anti-corruption authorities, parliamentarians, judges and government officials at various levels and sectors as well as activists in civil society and the private sector on international standards and comparative experiences in 11 policy areas, engaging more than 1000 individuals in more than 50 trainings, workshops and conferences. The Project was also able to provide direct technical support to 8 countries in implementing the UNCAC and conducting the self-assessment of its implementation. It also supported the establishment of participatory dialogues on sectoral initiatives in 5 countries and the launching of related specific initiatives in 3 of them. In addition, ACIAC supported the work of ACINET as the Network’s support unit. Efforts were also conducted to support countries in monitoring and evaluating anti-corruption efforts through specific assessments and to engage with civil society and enhance governmental coordination. The Regional Project also supported countries in monitoring and evaluating their anti-corruption strategies. With regards to legislative support, the Project contributed to the establishment of more effective laws for the prevention and combatting of corruption and namely relating to access to information, asset disclosure, whistle-blower protection, illicit enrichment and asset recovery. ACIAC also strived to expand cooperation between anti-corruption authorities and non-governmental entities, namely through the provision of knowledge and information exchange as well as training for civil society organizations and the development and dissemination of training materials specifically geared towards small and medium enterprises in the Arab countries and law faculties. Finally, Mr. EL SEBLANI announced that the Regional Project’s second phase (2015-2017) would build on these achievements and lessons learned as well as the recommendations of the Regional Consultation.

This was followed by a presentation from Mr. Moulay El Hassan ALAOUI SLIMANI, Head of Cabinet and Senior Advisor to the President of the Central Authority for Corruption Prevention in Morocco who presented the efforts of the Government of Morocco in the areas of anti-corruption and integrity in recent years, starting from the ratification by Morocco of the UNCAC in 2007. Mr. SLIMANI also analyzed the specificities of the Central Authority’s mandate and work and presented its achievements before discussing the Authority’s new law, currently under discussion in Parliament. Official delegations of Arab countries then provided brief reports

on the progress achieved in their respective countries, the challenges they face and some of the priorities that they have identified for future cooperation.

The UNCAC as a means to achieve real progress towards transparency and accountability

Building on previous efforts in the Arab countries where the UNCAC served as a valuable overarching framework for action, acting as a mobilizing instrument in sensitive contexts and as a provider of concrete entry points for others, participants agreed that a more focused approach is required, with a view to going beyond the UNCAC and using it as a means to achieve more transparency and accountability on the ground. In this regard, participants agreed on to focus on legislative and institutional priorities for action in 2015 and beyond.

In light of the positive experience many Arab countries had in using the UNCAC and namely the self-assessment of the implementation of the Convention to push for legislative reform and identify related priorities, participants agreed on the need to prioritize the related support received. This includes a greater focus on measures that promote the provision of more information to the public and that foster stronger trust in the integrity of civil servants including provisions relating to asset declaration, conflict of interest and codes of conduct. The need for a group of specialized Arab experts in this field that are able to provide quick technical support in this regard was highlighted as a key recommendation.

Participants also called for the establishment of more effective inter-ministerial collaboration on assessing and promoting the implementation of the Convention as well as on monitoring and evaluating broader national anti-corruption and integrity policies and programs. They also underlined the need to establish strong linkages between the design, implementation and monitoring phases according to available resources.

Another need that emerged was the intensification of efforts to develop the relatively lacking preventive capacities within anti-corruption agencies and strengthening the capacities of investigative and prosecutorial authorities and enhancing their collaboration with anti-corruption agencies, the private sector and ordinary citizens, as well as with their peers in other countries. Another key discussion point highlighted the need to reinforce the role of parliaments in taking appropriate legislative and oversight action with a view to promote transparency and accountability and a more effective implementation of the UNCAC and other related international and regional standards.

Finally, participants called for the expansion of the support of UNDP-ACIAC to include the Arab Convention against Corruption (ACAC) and the development of specific guidance for its review and implementation in a manner that promotes complementarity with the UNCAC.

Towards effective anti-corruption work in key sectors

Several Arab countries are ready to move the anti-corruption and integrity agenda to specific sectors, while noting that the readiness of countries varies in this regard. Chiefly, participants agreed that the focus in this regard should be on identifying integrity challenges and corruption risks at the sectoral level drawing on comparative experiences and existing tools worldwide, with a view to identifying sectoral reform strategies and action plans that provide concrete solutions. They proposed means to do so and identified sectoral priorities for action in 2015 and beyond, focusing on sectors that are important for development efforts and for the citizen, such as sectors that deliver basic public services and sectors that generate major revenue for the State.

“Customs is a key sector to enhance integrity, fight corruption and safeguard national security”

Mr. Mohamed Hossam RASHWAN
Administrative Control Authority, Egypt

Participants called for supporting concrete initiatives on health, justice, education, customs, transportation, and construction, while noting that other sectors are important but may require more preparatory work prior to active engagement, such as natural resources and national defense. A key recommendation that emerged from the discussions was the importance of establishing strategic synergies and complementarities between the sectoral reform efforts and

the broader overarching reform efforts at the national level. Promoting the development and implementation of Memorandums of Understanding between anti-corruption agencies and sectoral authorities with a view to promoting effective and sustainable cooperation was also raised.

Participants also agreed on the need to bringing special attention to the inclusion of all key stakeholders in sectoral efforts, namely users from among the public, concerned civil society organizations and businesses as well as related state institutions, and namely with regards to monitoring and evaluation related efforts. Utilizing the vast potential of collective action and social accountability as mechanisms for action at the sectoral level was highlighted in this regard. Finally, developing and implementing suitable training materials to raise awareness and promote targeted reform actions at the sectoral level was highlighted by a number of stakeholders.

“Training, communication, cooperation are keys to successful sectoral anti-corruption work”

Dr. Hikmat ABU ALFOUL
Ministry of Health, Jordan

Expanding opportunities for constructive engagement against corruption

A number of Arab countries in the region have had fruitful experiences in engaging non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector in anti-corruption efforts. This has yielded positive results in adopting inclusive national anti-corruption strategies and in the area of legislative reform and policy oversight for example.

While there is an agreement on the need to expand the circle of stakeholders that are engaged in anti-corruption efforts in Arab countries; which groups precisely to engage and how to best engage and support them remained open for debate. Indeed, engaging actors beyond the traditional ones such as anti-corruption authorities and representatives from the judiciary and the “usual suspects” was deemed crucial by participants for a number of reasons. Given that corruption is often a collective endeavor, fighting it is also most effective when done collectively. In addition, corruption affects the public good, a matter that is related to everyone in society and not just to specific individuals. Moreover, corruption is not a victimless crime and as such, everyone has an interest in fighting it. In addition, in order to sustain the progress achieved in the fight against corruption, it is necessary to mobilize and invest in others. Finally, the transformations that Arab countries have been witnessing and the opportunities and challenges this have brought forth entails that more efforts are done to meet the expectations of all existing groups.

“We need to give stakeholders the sense of ownership to effectively engage them in anti-corruption efforts”

Mouheb GAROUI
I-Watch Executive Director

A number of “new” stakeholders to engage in anti-corruption efforts emerged from the discussions, based on their voice, power, authority, leverage and knowledge. This included parliamentarians, reform drivers at the local level, young politicians, women in leadership positions and population segments that are about to embark on career paths. Participants agreed that a greater focus was needed to effectively enable anti-corruption authorities to engage these different types of governmental and non-governmental

stakeholders in their efforts through specific methodologies. They also agreed that such new stakeholders would play a key role in informing and monitoring related reform actions but that they needed to be engaged from their own roles and perspectives and that efforts were needed to identify the specific needs of each group.

Increasing the engagement of the private sector was underlined given the positive experiences of Arab countries in this regard. Working on incentives and sanctions for increased integrity and transparency of companies, and further underlining the importance of collective action to engage the private sector and especially small and medium enterprises against corruption, was highlighted as a key element. Remarks also highlighted the need to work more closely with parliamentarians on raising public awareness and on enhancing their oversight responsibilities. The added value of empowering youth and mainly young politicians was noted by all especially given the demographics in Arab countries. Participants also agreed that women in leadership positions were deemed to be able to play a bigger role in anti-corruption efforts given their growing role in government and in economic sectors but also as mothers and educators. In addition, an interesting point raised by some participants was to consider engaging religious and ethical figures in related awareness raising and educational efforts given the voice they benefit from in communities.

Producing and disseminating knowledge products in judicial and administrative training institutes as well as in universities and especially law schools and business schools was agreed upon as a means to target the engagement of population segments that are about to embark on their career paths. Many country delegations also underlined the need to enshrine values of integrity throughout the curricula of primary and secondary education, with a view to increasing the establishment of future generations that are more resistant to corruption and more ready to act against it and increasing their ownership of related efforts. Engaging citizens more generally through the use of Information and Communication Technologies was also highlighted as an important means for engaging new stakeholders.

“Using ICTs is key to enhance effective engagement against corruption”

Dr. Salem FARHAN
National Anti-Corruption Commission
Saudi Arabia

Finally, participants underlined the need to identify sustainable frameworks to enhance communication and cooperation between stakeholders, also benefiting from the unique dynamic offered by ACINET in this regard. Some of them also referred to the importance of supporting the media and investigative journalism capacities, highlighting in this regard the importance of laws and practices that promote access to information.

Arab countries in transition: particularities, risks and opportunities

At the end of the second day, participants embarked on a discussion about the key characteristics of Arab countries in transition in comparison with other Arab countries and what this entails for anti-corruption efforts, while noting that Arab countries in transition differ among each other. They identified key opportunities that such transformations provided for the anti-corruption agenda, and especially with regards to expanding the space for dialogue on anti-corruption, creating a stronger demand for more effective anti-corruption work and a

political momentum for increased efforts in some cases, which has led to legislative and constitutional reform and the adoption of inclusive national anti-corruption strategies. Participants also highlighted the difficulties such transitions pose for effective anti-corruption reform efforts and the additional stress it imposes for planning and implementing in an inclusive manner and the need for raising awareness on a number of new issues. Other difficulties underlined included the difficulty in identifying priorities, the fragility of trust in state institutions and the lack of coordination between control authorities.

To address some of the risks associated with working on anti-corruption in transition countries, participants called for anchoring such efforts in a broader accountability agenda, and for a greater focus on trust-building and inclusion and for embarking on stronger national anti-corruption strategies that prioritize increasing revenue generation and service delivery

Among other things, participants identified priorities for anti-corruption work in Arab countries in transition including enabling independent and effective anti-corruption agencies that open to communication and cooperation with all stakeholders; revamping of the justice systems to enhance trust citizens and investors; empowering parliamentarians to act on behalf of citizen interests; increasing the space for civil society expression and action; establishing platforms for public-private dialogue; seeking avenues to enhance the professionalism and proactive engagement of media on corruption issues; and finally supporting role models and champions in countries in transition.

Participants also discussed reconciliation and transitional justice issues, especially given the role corruption can play in hindering stability and noted the importance of promoting anti-corruption efforts in this regard with a focus on prevention, and the prioritization of key cases that are of particular relevance to the public opinion.

Notes from the Opening and Closing Sessions

The opening session underlined the importance of working on integrity and anti-corruption in Arab countries in light of the transformations the region has been witnessing since 2011. H.E. Mr. Abdesselam ABOUDRAR, President of the Central Authority for Corruption Prevention in Morocco emphasized the importance of continuing efforts to enhance integrity and fight corruption in the Arab countries and considered the Consultation as an important step in this regard. He also highlighted key related achievements in Morocco and the role it played at the regional level.

Ms. Ayshanie LABE, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP Morocco also underlined the importance the Consultation holds, namely with regards to strengthening the engagement of UNDP in supporting anti-corruption and integrity efforts in the region. She concluded that a shift was taking place with regards to the explicit inclusion of corruption issues in the global development agenda. Indeed, anti-corruption issues were not present in the millennium development goals but that there were proposals to include specific components on accountability and transparency in the 2015 post-agenda and to translate them into specific objectives and indicators.

As for Mr. Yakup BERIS, Regional Programme Adviser at the Regional Bureau for Arab States in UNDP, he presented the four outcome areas of the Regional Bureau which flow from UNDP's Strategic Plan covering 2014 to 2017 and which are: inclusive growth, inclusive governance, gender, and social cohesion. These four outcome areas are underpinned by two interlinked themes which are inclusion and resilience. Mr. BERIS stated that the anti-corruption and integrity agenda relates to both. It relates to inclusion because it makes information available to ordinary citizens and provides them with mechanisms to use this information in order to react

against corruption. It also relates to resilience because it makes public and private institutions stronger, by reducing corruption risks that weakens state and non-state institutions, making them vulnerable to shocks. Mr. Beris acknowledged with appreciation the financial contributions of the Governments of the United States, Belgium, Canada and France, as well as the Siemens Integrity Initiative (SII) and commended the cooperation with various regional and international organizations, including the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the League of Arab States (LAS).

H.E. Mr. Mohamed EL OUAFA, Minister of General Affairs and Governance in Morocco also addressed participants by emphasizing the growing interest anti-corruption has been received in past years and stated that the Consultation is a translation of this interest. He mentioned key related accomplishments in Morocco and underlined the need to further focus on awareness raising of anti-corruption issues and the incorporation of related courses at various levels in schools and universities. He also underlined the need for adequate planning in times of regional transformation to ensure that anti-corruption efforts are effective.

During the closing session, Mr. Radwan BEN KHADRA, Legal Advisor to the Secretary General at the League of Arab States underlined the importance of such a Consultation for Arab countries and expressed the League of Arab States' strong support for ACIAC and appreciation for its achievements in the framework of ACINET. He also expressed support for the next phase and committed to enhance cooperation in the future and strengthen cooperation with regards to the ACAC and the League of Arab States guidance laws.

Finally, Mr. Bruno POUZAT, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Morocco reflected on the important ideas and recommendations that emerged from the two-day Consultation and that allowed to inform related needs and priority reforms while further underlining the commitment of Arab countries to continue their efforts.

The results of the high-level consultation as highlighted in this report will feed into efforts to develop the second phase of the Regional Project ACIAC which constitutes a key component of UNDP's new Regional Programme for Arab states and UNDP's Strategic Plan for the period of 2014-2017. It is expected that the internal steps necessary for the adoption of the regional project document be completed afterwards, with a view to beginning implementation in 2015, while prioritizing support to countries that have expressed their desire to engage in related activities and benefit from its services.
