Background and rationale

For more than a year and a half, the Arab region has been witnessing a tremendous period of transformation. What started as a youth-led movement demanding change in Tunisia has had crucial consequences for the entire region, and continues to generate hopes and expectations, albeit increasingly mixed with caution and concerns about what the future may bring. The Arab masses have denounced corruption and demanded democratic governance, human rights, social justice and economic inclusion. This highlights the importance of building new relations between States and citizens, but also across society, based on a common vision of democracy, justice, and rights.

In June 2011, in response to these events, UNDP organized the international forum *Pathways to Democratic Transitions* which opened the discussion on some of the key governance challenges expected in times of transition\(^1\). These included, among others, ensuring the integrity of electoral processes, addressing the needs for transitional justice, and supporting constitutional dialogue, as steps towards the elaboration of a new social contract that will uphold the key principles of social justice and equity. As a follow up to the international forum, the Regional Centre in Cairo (RCC) supported and continues to support many specific events and activities to assist country offices and national partners to address those important governance needs\(^2\). UNDP Regional Project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in Arab Countries (ACIAC), launched in 2011, offers a unique platform that promotes targeted and participatory policy reforms and collective action against corruption across the region. The Project has specific focus on social accountability, emphasizing the need to build synergies between anti-corruption efforts and ongoing efforts to promote evidence-based policy reforms and support citizen participation in formulation policies and monitoring of their implementation.

Now, a year and a half later, the “Governance Week” will take stock of the progress made towards democratic transitions from the perspective of social accountability, focusing on the process of renegotiating the social contract between the citizens and State in the Arab Region. Indeed, the events taking place since the beginning of 2011 have opened the door for better accountability, and have created a new social dynamic, not only in countries going through transition but in the entire Arab region.

The concept of social accountability refers to a form of accountability that emerges through actions by citizens and civil society organization [CSOs] aimed at holding the State to account, as well as efforts by

---

1 This international forum allowed representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia to learn about the critical decisions and challenges faced by leaders of the democratization processes of such diverse countries as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa.

2 E.g. Regional consultation on Transitional Justice, Cairo, November 2011; Regional consultation on Constitutional Dialogue, Tunis, November 2011; Sub-Regional Forum on Principles of Independent and Sustainable Electoral Management, Cairo, April 2012.
government and other actors [media, private sector, donors] to support and respond to these actions. Accountability relationships help not only to ensure that decision-makers adhere to publicly agreed standards, norms and goals, but also to prevent conflict. In addition to vertical accountability related to mechanisms of holding the state to account, horizontal accountability, achieved through a system of mutual checks and balances and oversight bodies inside the government, but also between civil society organizations and mass media, is equally important.

Three key actors have a role to play in strengthening social accountability. Firstly, Governments have a central responsibility to implement the important political, legislative and judicial reforms needed to achieve a democratic transition. All Arab States have ratified various international human rights treaties and more than 16 countries have committed to implement the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Such international legally binding instruments codify the minimum standards that need to be achieved by duty-bearers at all levels of society—but especially organs of the State – and against which they will be held accountable. The Governments are also responsible for creating an enabling environment for social accountability relations, guaranteeing the freedom of association and access to information, ensuring citizens’ rights to public information and opening up public budget and expenditure records, improving internal systems of transparency etc.

Secondly, civil society emerged as a growing actor that can and should play an active role holding the State accountable and advocating for policy proposals to advance social justice agenda based on research evidence. Also, as many of the underlying grievances in the region that led to the revolutions come from socially excluded, poor, vulnerable, migrant and rural parts of the society, it is important to ensure that their voices are heard. Basic public services (water, sanitation, health, education) are vital for their welfare, and social accountability initiatives ensuring citizen oversight of such services and their participation in decision-making can significantly improve the quality and accessibility of such services. Related efforts have begun to emerge recently in a number of Arab countries, but are still very limited in scope and impact. UNDP is playing a key factor in advancing related initiatives. In the Arab region, organized civil society is currently considered to be very weak. For many years it has suffered from different modalities of control, often with a narrow focus on service provision. At the same time, the events of the “Arab spring” or “Arab Awakening” have demonstrated the power of new emerging forms of civic engagement. Yet, these emerging civil society movements are still in the process of identifying modes of engagement with other stakeholders that could lead to constructive and positive contribution to the process of change, beyond street mobilization. In the given highly volatile environment that characterizes the transition period, it can also be very difficult for external actors to effectively assess the most appropriate entry points for working with civil society.

Thirdly, both traditional media and new social media play a crucial role in amplifying the voice of the citizens and facilitating the dialogue between the civil society and the state. Since these three actors are not at the same stage of “maturity”, the discussions during the Governance Week will pay particular attention to the role of civil society.

The overarching aim of the Governance Week would be to analyze the roles of various actors in promoting social accountability in the region. After looking at the current context of change, highlighting the diversity of circumstances among the different countries in the region, the participants will explore what social accountability means in the Arab region. More specifically they will consider how it could be strengthened, looking at what has already been done, as well as focusing more specifically on the role of governance evidence and human rights monitoring, particularly the UPR, as mechanisms for enhancing accountability relations.

---

3 UNDP (2010) Fostering Social Accountability: From Principle to Practice, Guidance Note
During the two days of parallel sessions, it is envisioned that the participants take a close look at the concepts and applications of governance assessments, including the international anti-corruption and human rights review mechanisms, and understand their practical added value in supporting social change. The participants would discuss good practices and lessons learnt (from inside and outside of the Arab Region) on the implementation modalities of these mechanisms, and reflect on strategies to increase their policy impact. It will also attempt to formulate practical roadmaps for a joint action in transferring and implementing successful social accountability practices through South-South knowledge exchange.

In particular, the Governance Week will aim to:

- Initiate a high-level dialogue about the importance of social accountability in the dynamic context of change of the Arab region;
- Analyze specific inter-governmental and national accountability mechanisms, and identify the challenges and opportunities of their implementation in the current regional context;
- Strengthen the ability of and empower three actors (governments, CSOs, and media) to use recommendations emerging from these mechanisms and processes to influence policy and ensure protection and promotion of human rights, prevention and sanctioning of corruption, and overall improved governance;
- Identify specific mutually supportive actions for each of the three sets of actors in creating new and strengthening existing social accountability mechanisms at central and local level;
- Formulate joint recommendations for action, and possibly, project proposals for transferring and adopting existing social accountability mechanisms through South-South knowledge exchanges in cases where such successful and applicable mechanisms are readily available; and
- Identify the role the UN can play in supporting the three actors in the identified actions.

**Participants**

The proposed Governance Week will bring together representatives of UNDP Country Offices in the region and their national counterparts, civil society, national human rights institutions, anti-corruption agencies, as well as think tanks from the region. Key development partners, such as other UN Agencies, global and regional multilateral organizations and funds – OHCHR, ESCWA, UNODC, UN WOMEN, World Bank, OECD, Ford Foundation, Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, and Saudi Fund for Development – will also be invited. International IDEA and Affiliated Network for Social Accountability Arab World, among others, would co-organize some of the sessions of the event.

*Format of the event is in Annex 1*
Annex 1: Format of the event

Day 1

During the first day of the event, the participants will take stock of the progress made towards democratic transitions in the region during the last year and a half. Indeed, several countries in the region held elections, witnessing the rise of new political powers; began national dialogue, constitutional reforms; launched and progressed more concrete and more participatory anti-corruption initiatives or started the long process to address transitional justice, all with very different results. Thus, Governance Week will be an opportunity to take a candid look at the current status of democratic change in the region. Given the dynamism and culturally grounded transformations in the Arab States, the first day of the Governance Week will approach what social accountability can or should mean in emerging paradigms of change in the region, and will take stock of the important changes that already took place from a social accountability perspective. Since social accountability is very much linked to sustainable development, and with international attention currently focused on the outcomes of Rio +20 and the beginning of a discussion of the post-2015 framework, the Governance Week will be an opportunity to see how the various pledges and commitments made by countries in the region can be supported.

Day 2 and 3

Social accountability mechanisms can help institutionalize conflicts, taking them out of iconic squares in the region to institutional processes and the realm of decision-making. They can support conflict prevention by addressing State-citizen relationship but also by reinforcing internal accountability of State institutions. Various mutually reinforcing mechanisms and processes are available to support the three actors in strengthening accountability relations to advance democratic and economic reform. The second and third days of the Governance week will take a closer look, in parallel sessions, at mechanisms available to support the three actors in their work on social accountability. One stream will focus broadly on governance assessments, looking at how these could be conducted with focus on various thematic areas. Assessments of integrity and corruption, as well as the mechanisms of review and implementation of the UNCAC would be considered in a dedicated session. The second stream will focus more specifically on human right monitoring, looking at the details of Universal Periodic Review process.

Governance Assessments

Multiple reviews of MDG achievements to date have highlighted governance as one of the missing links in the achievement and sustainability of MDG results. As international attention is currently focused on the outcomes from Rio +20, and the beginning of a discussion of the post-2015 framework, the question is raised about the role governance will have in new international commitments, and accordingly how advances in governance may be measured and for what purposes. On the national level, improved supply of and demand for high quality data on governance can result in improved social accountability, but this requires the active engagement of multiple stakeholder groups. Active collaboration between policy-makers, national institutions, citizens and civil society in indicator definition and data collection processes can be a more powerful catalyst for long term improvements in democratic practice than measurement of results alone.

In the Arab Region, solid research evidence and data on governance are needed to underpin formulation of new policies for reforms, as well as serve to establish baselines for evaluating the progress and the extent of on-going transformations. Indeed, lack of accurate, timely and relevant governance data affects the ability of citizens to hold their governments to account for their performance, as well as
hinders efforts of national government and other stakeholders to ensure good performance management and measure progress in governance. Data and indicators on democratic governance are only as valid as the information that has been released for analysis (e.g., budget expenditures). Even in countries where open data movement has made a lot of progress; governments are usually more comfortable in providing certain kinds of information, but not necessarily the kinds that civil society actually wants to see. This is why both the quality of information, as well as the political will to open government data to public scrutiny, are essential. Collection and dissemination of governance data is complicated by lack of freedom of information legislation, with restrictive laws, policies and institution arrangements limiting access to information. This is exacerbated by the lack of transparency of governance processes, the practice of adjusting figures to fit political purposes, weak institutional capacities in state and civil society, and lack of credible and impartial media. Strong institutional and context analysis is required in order to understand the challenges and prioritize actions towards ensuring the accuracy and relevance of governance data.

Recognizing that a rights-based approach to democratic governance is more likely to be achieved if targets for attainment and expectations of how governments should perform are formulated by the national stakeholders, UNDP has been advocating for and supporting implementation of country-led governance assessments. Such assessments can serve as critical social accountability and transparency mechanisms for governance performance and citizen voice. When all relevant stakeholders participate in the assessment process, it stimulates their demand for governance information and a demand for greater accountability from government. Country-specific and disaggregated indicators allow targeting specific institutions and practices that have to be changed.

The UNDP Global Programme on Democratic Governance Assessments works to assist developing countries in producing data on governance towards reform and improved policy making. The aim of the Programme, coordinated by the Oslo Governance Centre, is to develop the capacities of governments, national statistical offices and civil society in the collection, maintenance and analysis of governance-related data. In October 2011, it organised the Oslo Governance Forum, which brought together more than 270 policy makers, experts and practitioners who have adopted the “Oslo Principles onDemocratic Governance Assessments”. As a regional follow up, Africa Forum on Civil Society and Governance Assessments in November 2011 showcased innovation and leadership in Africa in using assessments and technology to promote social accountability on the continent. Now, a year later, this consultation in the Arab Region, will aim to locate the latest thinking on the subject in the context of transitions in the region.

A governance assessment serves many purposes. It can enhance a country’s capacity to evaluate measure and monitor progress towards democratic governance today and in the future. An assessment makes it easier to understand the quality of governance. With better understanding comes more effective action to improve the practice of democratic governance. National indicators developed by the country shed light, through statistical analysis, on the problems areas. An assessment can, for example, help to identify institutions and practices that perpetuate unfair and sub-standard provision of services to marginalized and vulnerable groups. The process also can provide opportunities for the poor to voice their concerns.

While the field of governance data is still relatively underdeveloped in the Arab region, there are some pioneering efforts by international and regional organizations, as well as national stakeholders. Arab Human Development reports have made a significant contribution to producing critical analysis and governance data by Arab experts. UNDP has also supported a number of country-led initiatives on governance assessments – governance indicators on corruption and sector governance in Egypt, local governance integrity self-assessments in Palestine, governance indicators in the context of APRM
process in Djibouti, urban governance indicators in Morocco and Saudi Arabia. Regionally, the Arab Reform Initiative has produced two rounds of democracy assessments and has recently partnered with Arab Barometer to produce more comprehensive analysis. The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) recently published the Arab Opinion Index report for 2011. International IDEA also published the State of Local Democracy in the Arab Word report for 2011. It is important to reflect on these works to draw the lessons from these initiatives, with particular focus on assessing their potential to influence policy and strengthen social accountability in light of the current political and institutional context.

The parallel session on Governance Assessments aims to achieve the following objectives:
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the three actors in conducting governance assessments;
- Identify avenues to increase the policy impact of the assessment results;
- Identify entry points for interventions by international organizations, CSOs and governments;
- Support South-South cooperation through identification of specific exchanges and support missions between countries to share expertise.

**Universal Periodic Review**

Another important accountability mechanism available to support social accountability is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR was created through the UN General Assembly in 2006 by resolution 60/251, which established the Human Rights Council. The UPR is a State-driven process, which reviews the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States once every four years, providing an opportunity for States to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries. This mechanism is one of the key elements of the new Human Rights Council which reminds States of their responsibility to respect, protect and fulfill all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It aims at improving the human rights situation in all countries, identifying human rights violations wherever they occur, and supporting States to rectify them.

The review is conducted through interactive dialogues between the country under review and a working group composed of the 47 members of the Council. Each State review process is assisted by a group of three States, known as “troika”, that serve as rapporteurs. The review is based on information provided by the State under review, independent human rights experts (UN, special rapporteurs etc.), and other stakeholders including non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions. After the working group session, the Human Rights Council meets in a plenary session to study and adopt the final document of the UPR. The final document contains a summary of the procedures, conclusions and recommendations, as well as the voluntary commitments made by the States under review. These recommendations endorsed by States can serve as benchmarks for accountability.

The UPR is a useful example of mechanism available to the three actors identified (government, civil society, and the media) to support their work on social accountability. However, as the UPR is a fairly new mechanism it is still perceived as very complex or inaccessible for actors other than the Governments. For example, very few civil society organization are aware that while civil society's contribution used to take the form of “shadow reports” sent to treaty bodies, the advent of UPR provides a formal opportunity for them to participate in the process. Both civil society and the media have made limited use of the recommendations of the UPR to support for their work on legal activism and social accountability.

Yet, the format of the UPR opens the door to more dialogue and collaboration. It is therefore essential to underline the importance of the UPR as a mechanism to support social accountability, and use it as an opportunity to initiate a human rights dialogue, and engage the Government further in the protection
and promotion of human rights. Considering the very different status of countries in transition in the region, the session on UPR of the Governance Week will specifically look at how this mechanism can support initial engagement between the three actors working on social accountability (government, civil society and media), and how the follow-up on the recommendations can lead to specific mutually supportive actions for each of the three sets of actors. With the first cycle of the UPR behind us, it is time to look at the challenges and opportunities posed by the UPR in a region through important changes, and extract the good practices (from within the region and outside the region) that can benefit the Arab States during the second cycle of the UPR.

Two regional meetings\(^4\) organized in Dakar and Johannesburg by UNDP in collaboration with OHCHR have particularly looked at the process of the UPR, looking at how best States can commit themselves in collaboration with their partners, to ensure systematic assessment of their human rights situation through the review process. Another regional meeting held in November 2011 in Moldova\(^5\), looked at the identification of the roles of various stakeholders during the critical phase of implementing the UPR recommendations. Finally, a global e-discussion held in April-May 2012 looked at UN engagement with the UPR (opportunities and strategies for UN and National Programming) in the preparation of the UPR and in the follow-up. The lessons learnt from these meetings will also feed into this session’s discussions.

The parallel session on UPR aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase the understanding of the three actors (governments, CSOs, and media) of the function and proceedings of UPR;
- Identify the challenges and opportunities for more inclusive engagement and constructive dialogue between the actors for the preparation and implementation of the recommendations of the UPR;
- Strengthen the ability of the three actors to use UPR recommendations to support work on social accountability (e.g. legal activism, monitoring, internal accountability within State institutions);
- Identify entry points for UN’s support to the three actors based on the recommendations identified.

**UNCAC Review Mechanism**

The Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the UNCAC was adopted at the third session of the Conference of States Parties (CoSP), in Doha (Qatar) on 13 November 2009.\(^3\) As a result, countries will be increasingly required to closely examine the progress of their implementation efforts and take more concrete steps in the fight against corruption. In the words of the UN Secretary General, “from now on, States will be judged by the actions they take to fight corruption, not just the promises they make”. The Review Mechanism is an intergovernmental process whose overall goal is to assist States Parties in the implementation of the Convention. It is expected to promote and facilitate the provision of technical assistance by enabling States Parties to identify and substantiate specific needs in this regard. It is also expected to provide the CoSP with information on successes, good practices and challenges related to UNCAC implementation, thus promoting a more sustainable knowledge exchange among States Parties.

---

\(^4\) West and Central Africa Regional Meeting on the UPR, July 2010, Senegal; Eastern and Southern Africa Meeting on the UPR, South Africa, September 2010.

\(^5\) International Conference on responding to the UPR recommendations: challenges, innovation and leadership, Moldova, November 2011.
Each review phase is composed of two review cycles of five years. The first cycle will review chapters III (Criminalization and law enforcement) and IV (International cooperation), and the second cycle will review chapters II (Preventive measures) and V (Asset recovery). Each cycle includes four annual rounds with one fourth of the States Parties selected, by the drawing of lots, to be reviewed during each round. The review process starts with a self-assessment exercise conducted by each country, using the comprehensive UNCAC Self-Assessment Checklist (Checklist). Afterwards, the self-assessment report is analyzed by two other States Parties, which are also selected by drawing of lots. The reviewing States Parties may request additional information through dialogue with the State under review and possibly direct means of information gathering such as a country visit or joint meeting as agreed. The findings of the process are then developed into a country review report, based on a blueprint to ensure consistency, and submitted to the CoSP. The executive summary of this report is made public.

The Review Mechanism is therefore the formal mechanism and the internationally agreed framework of minimum requirements for assessing UNCAC implementation. Indeed, the Review Mechanism sets out a number of obligatory steps that States Parties are required to undertake in this regard, but also opens the door for willing countries to engage in more elaborate and inclusive assessment exercises, should they wish to increase the usefulness and reliability of the assessment exercise as a whole. The experience of Arab countries in the area of UNCAC assessments is constantly developing. Jordan and Morocco have officially completed their reviews and published their executive summaries. Many other Arab countries, including Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen participated in reviewing other countries. Iraq, Kuwait, and UAE are currently in the final stages of their first review, while Djibouti, Tunisia, Qatar are preparing to start theirs. The Palestinian National Authority, although not formally required to do so, has committed itself to active participation in the UNCAC self assessment exercise. Generally speaking, the involvement of non-governmental actors in these reviews has been very limited. Instead, separate non-governmental initiatives were launched in various countries including Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and the occupied Palestinian territory.

With the establishment of the UNCAC Review Mechanism and the increasing awareness in the Arab region, on the importance of assessments as a cornerstone for evidence-based anticorruption reforms including the effective implementation of the UNCAC and sectoral reform initiatives, the demand for cooperation in the area of integrity and anti-corruption assessments is expected to increase significantly.

In response, UNDP will work with its partners in the framework of UNDP-ACIAC, and other related country projects, to strengthen the capacity of governmental and non-governmental practitioners, to design, implement and use anti-corruption assessments in a contextualized manner, with a focus on reinforcing the UNCAC Review Mechanism and informing national anticorruption policies and strategies.

**Day 4**

In light of the discussions that have taken place on the three previous days, this last day of the Governance Week will focus on the enabling factors for the way forward and the concrete steps that can be taken to strengthen social accountability. Participants will be invited to group by country to discuss draft national action plans which will include concrete steps to strengthen work carried out on social accountability in the country, looking at the role of the three actors. This will also be an opportunity for international organizations to identify entry points where support will be needed.

Particular emphasis would be placed on South-South and triangular (bridging the North-South and South-South Cooperation systems) cooperation models. After introductory discussion on the subject of South-South and triangular cooperation, participants will be invited to group by type of actors to discuss the actions necessary to improve (1) the enabling environment (e.g. policy, legal and regulatory framework), (2) the development of capacities of the three actors, and (3) the strengthening of their governing infrastructure, and identify possible opportunities of South-South/triangular collaboration.
**Governance Fair and South-South Cooperation exhibition**

Throughout the four days of the governance week, a Governance Fair will support the dissemination of relevant knowledge products on various governance-related subjects. The Governance Week will also hold a South-South Cooperation exhibition, featuring innovative solutions and best-practices in governance and social accountability from the countries in the region.