



Foreword by the Manager of the UNDP Regional Centre for the Arab States

The Arab region is witnessing a tremendous momentum of transformation and potential for change. What started as a youth-led movement 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. People of the region have denounced corruption and demanded democratic governance, human rights, social justice, integrity, equity and economic inclusion. This highlights the importance of strengthening new relations between States and citizens, and 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. These included ensuring the integrity of electoral processes, addressing the needs for transitional justice, and supporting constitutional dialogue, all steps to 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. A year and a half later, the Arab Governance Week (November 26-29, 2012) presented an opportunity to assess and support the move towards social accountability. Organized in close collaboration with OHCHR, UNWOMEN, IDEA and ANSA AW, it brought together 240 participants from 17 Arab countries, with delegates representing governments (including 8 sitting Ministers), civil society, sitting judges, academics and the media, as well as UNDP country offices from the region. By convening such a diverse group to discuss the practice of accountability in the Arab Region and the role of various actors in furthering accountability relations in these turbulent times, UNDP has played a strategic role in brokering knowledge and facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue about the future of governance in the region.

The role of governance data and human rights monitoring through the Universal Period Review (UPR) process, as mechanisms for enhancing accountability relations, was explored in great depth and recommendations for action by various actors were developed. Governance assessments can play an important role in the introduction of democratic values and principles at various levels of society during the transformation process towards democratic societies. Perceptions about UPR should also be adjusted to recognize it as a process of accountability to the people, which opens the door for effective collaboration between the state and civil society.

Many events also shook the Arab region after the Governance Week. Although this report strictly reflects on the context and discussions from November 2012, the events that took place in the second half of 2013 in several Arab States showed that post-revolutionary arrangements were unable to address people's aspirations for inclusive democratic representation. This, in fact, reinforces the argument made during the Governance Week that democracy is more than elections, and emphasizes the role that mechanisms of social accountability can play in deepening and solidifying democratic processes.



The Governance Week also reflected UNDP's commitment to South-South cooperation by sharing the knowledge and experiences from Arab countries, and from Kenya, Malaysia, Armenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Ukraine, fostering strategic partnerships for future joint activities. The Governance Week also included a specific focus on knowledge exchange, outreach and communication. Governance-related knowledge products, printed materials, videos, publications, and poster exhibition, were showcased at the Knowledge Exhibition.

In closing, I would like to thank our partners for their support in making this event a success. I would also like to thank the different leaders and stakeholders from the Arab countries who came to share their rich experience and their perspectives on the current transition. I would also like to extend gratitude to the participants from other regions who accepted to share the successes and challenges they faced in their respective countries.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alia', is enclosed within a blue oval. The signature is positioned above a horizontal blue line.

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UNDP