Conceptual Note

On the Arab Conference on the Role of Civil Society in Implementing Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 (Doha\20-21 April 2016)

Introduction:

On 25 September, the 193 member states of the United Nations unanimously adopted Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Qatar Social Work Foundation (QSWF), in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund/ Arab Region (UNFPA), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the League of Arab States (LAS), will organize in Doha, between 20-21 April 2016, an Arab Regional Conference to address the Role of Civil Society in Implementing Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. This Conference will be the first event, at the Global and Regional levels, to discuss the involvement of Civil Society Organizations as a partner and actor in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Background:

On the 1st of January 2016 the United Nations officially ushered in the Agenda of Sustainable Development with its ambitious set of 17 goals and 169 targets to banish a whole host of social ills, to wipe out poverty, fight inequality and tackle climate change, over the next 15 years by 2030. Member states signed on to the Declaration on Sustainable Development called "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on countries to begin efforts to achieve the 17 SDGs over the next 15 years. Broad and ambitious in scope, the

Agenda addresses the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental, as well as important aspects related to peace, justice and effective institutions. The mobilization of means of implementation, including financial resources, technology development and transfer and capacity-building, as well as the role of partnerships, are also acknowledged as critical.

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development builds on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Not all the MDGs were met globally, depending on regions and the state of a country's development, but significant progress was made in several areas. However, progress has been uneven across regions and countries, leaving millions of people behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged due to sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location. Targeted efforts will be needed to reach the most vulnerable people.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development picks up from and moves well beyond the first set of global development goals. But where the MDGs specifically targeted countries from the 'global south', with a poverty focused agenda, the new Sustainable Development Goals aim more comprehensively at a range of challenges that the whole world faces, including but not limited to ending poverty.

The new Agenda is universal, aims to combat inequality and specifically targets vulnerable/marginalized groups to ensure that "no one is left behind". This is where the SDGs are expected to play a part. They stress everything from zero poverty, zero hunger, good health, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and affordable clean energy, to decent work and economic growth, innovation, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities, responsible consumption, climate action, unpolluted oceans and land, and partnerships to achieve the goals.

Implementation of Sustainable Development Agenda 2030:

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015 and the commitment from all governments towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) create a unique opportunity to promote the transformative potential of the new Agenda at all levels.

The implementation of those commitments will require not only a strong leadership from governments (at national, regional, sub-national and global levels) but also the engagement of much broader partnerships and the set-up of more creative alliances

and joined up advocacy.

Through The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, nations acknowledge the imperative of a revitalized global partnership. The Agenda envisaged an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the goals and targets, bringing together Governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources.

The scale and ambition of the new agenda require the inclusion of new partners such as national parliaments, regional and local authorities, academic institutions and volunteer groups. The revitalized global partnership will endeavor to deliver the means of implementation through mobilizing local public resources, and through local and international business and finance sectors, international development agencies, international trade as an engine for development, addressing systemic issues and science, technology, innovation and capacity building, and data, monitoring/ tracking.

Indicators to measure the progress in achieving goals and targets of the Agenda will be finalized by March 2016. Though the indicators selected may clarify how to measure success, but they do not indicate the manner in which the success has been achieved. In addition, establishment of national comparative baseline standards remain to be addressed.

Civil Society and Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030

Recent years have seen the remarkable rise of civil society as a global phenomenon. The forces of globalization have propelled the growth of civil society and civic action and opened up a global public space for debate and actions. They have also contributed to creating global public opinion, which is shaping the socio-political agenda and generating a cosmopolitan set of norms and public demands that transcend national boundaries. In the past twenty years, civil society activists have been the driving force behind wide-ranging multi-stakeholder unions and associations that work for public good.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have also long been actively involved in a wide range of development issues, advocating greater public participation in development plans, addressing inequalities and discrimination, respecting human rights, enhancing accountability over the performance of those who are responsible for achieving

development goals. CSOs have been contributing consultations and recommendations to the development of the 2030 Agenda for the last four years. These contributions helped to make a strong framework for future sustainable development.

Over the next 15 years, CSOs will play an important role by contributing alongside governments towards achieving desired goals. CSOs will monitor the implementation of Agenda 2030 on the basis of official data as well as alternative data gathered citizens, analyzing the results, preparing stakeholder reports and submitting these as inputs into the national, regional and global follow-up and review processes.

Implementing Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 in the Arab Region: the Role of Civil Society

The Arab region is undergoing significant change with the past four years having witnessed uprisings, and conflicts in a number of countries. In some countries, the conflicts are protracted with repercussions extending to the region as a whole.

These mounting challenges have never obstructed the Arab civil society throughout Arab region in advancing advocacy and support for rights, dignity and tolerance through increased civic initiatives, newly born civic groups, regional civic networks, and political organizations. Civil Society in the Arab Region is evolving in impactful and dynamic ways. Despite their inexperience and limited capacity, a younger generation has been connecting across borders.

With the present political and economic climate in the Arab countries favoring the delegation to the private sector of many tasks previously performed by the state, the role of civil society in promoting sustainable development should be expanded. As governments are being encouraged to transfer much of their power and resources to the private sector, CSOs started to provide some of those services that government had previously provided. In this way, civil society has acquired a significant role as contributor to the promotion of sustainable development.

The challenges are many and an understanding of the attributes needed to support a vibrant Civil Society in the Arab countries that can help promote peace, stability and sustainable development in the region, is needed. People in the Arab region need to understand the role that a vibrant Civil Society can play in ensuring that no one group is excluded from participating in shaping and enjoying the dividends of locally,

nationally, and regionally owned sustainable development. Equally importantly, CSOs in Arab countries have to work to develop a clear and strong vision about the transformative role that its different strands can play during the next fifteen years.

Several CSOs, in Arab countries, have played an important role, within the global civil society movement, in shaping the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its role will be crucial to making the Agenda's vision of wellbeing and human rights for all within planetary boundaries a reality. It is therefore important to ensure the involvement and support to civil society across the Arab Region, in a structured manner at every step in the implementation process, so as to empower people, create ownership and ensure accountability.

Engagement is needed to enhance the contributions of civil society organizations to country strategies for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. From the previous experience of implementing the MDGs some CSOs may have been involved in implementation but often not in strategic planning. As expected, the weak information-sharing often hampered the formation of strong partnerships. And due to the weak structure of the CSOs, it is urgent to pay attention to the significance of building and promoting their institutional capacity. The role of Civil Society and volunteerism in "localizing" the Agenda 2030 and in ensuring ownership of and accountability of its processes and results is crucial.

Objectives of the Conference and Expected Outputs:

Civil society can exercise its important role in promoting sustainable development through creating an enabling environment capable of establishing effective participation based on constructive partnership among the public sector, the private sector and civil society. One aspect of that role includes providing government supported basic services to citizens thereby promoting sustainable development .The role of civil society could also cover the three dimensions of sustainable development. CSOs channel people's participation in economic, social and environmental activities.

The overall aim of the conference is to generate innovative ideas and project voices from different civil society and stakeholders around the region on the challenges and opportunities for the Agenda 2030, bringing these into the discussions on the way to formulate and implement roadmaps at national level, and clarifying the

responsibilities of governments at all levels.

The focus will be in ensuring that civil society organizations and stakeholders are able to share knowledge and experience of implementation and accountability, work together on regional and national advocacy and track whether commitments made on Agenda 2030 are effectively turned into action, in order that they can make ambitious and sustained contributions in the implementation of the SDGs.

The proposed conference is targeting providing a platform to initiate a region wide discussion on the role of Civil Society in implementing Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development as well as monitoring progress in achieving its objectives and their targets. The conference , from this perspective, will aim to reach concrete recommendations on how Civil Society could participate in Arab countries in influencing and shaping policies as well as the decision making process related to Agenda 2030. The conference is aiming to shape a vision, for the Arab region, on the inclusion of the Arab Civil Society as an actor and partner in the implementation of Agenda 2030.

The main expected outcomes of the conference are the following:

a. Initiate regional consultations on the potential roles for Civil Society in the implementation of the 17 Objectives addressing the local, national and regional levels

b. Identify best practices to empower Civil Society Organizations in Arab countries to play a role in monitoring and measuring progress in achieving sustainable development objectives.

c. Launch a regional network of Arab Civil Society Organizations on Agenda 2030 to be a platform for support, and enhancement for the role of organizations in the Arab region to assume a critical role in implementing and monitoring progress.

d. Identify the role of civil society in formulating public policies related to implementing the sustainable development agenda.

Partners, Participation, and Themes:

A. Partners and mechanisms in organizing the conference and monitoring its outputs.

Establishing a joint committee chaired by Qatar Social Work Foundation (QSWF) and membership of UNDP, UNFPA, ESCWA and League of Arab States (LAS) for the purpose of coordinating and enhancing the integration of partners roles at all levels of planning , monitoring and implementing through all stages of the conference. QSWF will cooperate with the above mentioned four partners in providing substantive consultation and tangible support to communicate with civil society organizations in the Arab Region both at the regional and national levels with regard to preparations for the conference, monitoring and implementing its recommendations.

It is worth mentioning that the committee will include in its membership after the end of the conference any international or regional organizations concerned with its recommendations and decisions.

B. Targeted Participants:

The conference is expected to gather 120-150 participants representing the following categories:

- Key regional development CSOs networks in the Arab region
- Selected CSOs networks at the national level
- Government counterparts involved in the governance of CSO engagement in the Arab region
- Experts and specialists from the Arab region and globally.
- Representatives of the CSOs from GCC Countries.

C. Framework:

The event will span two working days, and the proposed framework is composed of an opening session, 2 plenary session, 3 plenary thematic parallel sessions (round table discussions) and a concluding session... The conference will begin with keynote speeches from High Level Persons representing the host country, UNDP, UNFPA, ESCWA and LAS and any international or regional organization that joins the

conference organizing team. Following the opening session there will a session introducing Agenda 2030 followed by a 3 plenary Sessions for Working Groups covering themes representing a cross-section of issues that are of vital importance to the region, arranged thematically. Sessions and working groups will be led by moderators with solid knowledge about Agenda 2030 and civil society in the Arab Region.

Conference Working Program
- Opening Session
- The host Country
- The United Nations
- League of Arab States

1. Plenary Discussion Session 1:

Presentation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: Prospects for Implementation (90 minutes) Prepared by ESCWA

Participants

1. **A brief presentation on Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 (SDA2030) and implementation prospects (15 minutes)**
   - Engaging civil society (CS) in the international agenda , and the importance of continued integration of CS as an effective partner
   - Prospects of achieving SDA by 2030, and the additional efforts demanded from States, sectors, coalitions and funders.
   - Expected responsibilities of Civil Society, public sector and private sector.

2. **Commentary by the host country (a prominent political figure- 7-10 minutes) includes main messages that address the following issues :**
   - Civil Society value added support to the international development agenda
   - Change in the roles of the 3 pillars (CS, private and public sectors) in viewing the future and new innovative partnerships.

المؤتمر العربي لدور المجتمع المدني
في أجندة التنمية المستدامة 2030
Arab Conference on the Role of Civil Society
in the sustainable Development Agenda 2030

قطر للعمل الاجتماعي
Qatar Social Work

- Kind of change in the social contract between the State and the citizen, and the importance of focusing on the principle of "A development that leaves no one behind", and the importance of engaging all vital social forces in the State in achieving this slogan.
- The significance of preparing and incorporating the international development agenda regionally and nationally in a manner that respects cultures during implementation.
- Funding the international development agenda nationally and regionally—an initiative launched by the host State.

3. **Commentary by the United Nations (A high level figure- 7-10 minutes) that includes main messages that address the following milestone issues:**
   - Significance of the rights aspect of the international agenda.
   - Focusing on bridging the gaps in social inequality in the Arab Region.
   - The importance of arriving at a development agenda focused on the population and their welfare in mutual cultural respect.
   - The importance of international cooperation in funding the international development agenda.
   - Opportunities available to Civil Society to constructively contribute to supporting the international development agenda.

4. **Commentary by Civil Society (High level figure—6-10 minutes) that includes the following main messages that constitute milestones :**
   - Challenges facing civil society—legislative, executive and funding environment
   - Opportunities available to civil society ---rights agenda and civil society potential capacities , including human capital
   - A conception of the shape of strategic partnership between CS, the private and the public sectors

5. **Commentary by the private sector (A high level figure—7-10 minutes) includes main messages that constitute milestones**
   - Social responsibility of the private sector.

- Private Sector vision of the role of civil society in Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.
- Opportunities of forming strategic partnerships among the three sectors and conditions of empowering and strengthening those partnerships.
- Announcing initiatives by the private sector to support the international development agenda, and partnership with civil society.

Under this item a presentation would be given about the general background of SDA2030, and the expected roles of various implementing parties (governments, private and public sectors). In this context the main focus would be on the role of civil society.

2. Parallel Sessions

A. First Session

Challenges facing implementation of SDA2030, with special focus on the Arab Region. The session includes one main paper and 4 lateral interventions.

1. **Main paper (20 minutes. UNDP bears the cost of preparing this paper). The paper discusses the following themes :**
   - Challenges facing SDA2030 in the Arab Region
   - Lessons learned from implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and ways of avoiding pitfalls in implementing SDA 2030
   - A glance at the role of civil society in implementing the MDGs and expanding its role in the SDA2030
   - Governance of implementing SDA2030 and requirements of reaching a development agenda that leaves no one behind
   - Future recommendations for partnerships and implementation mechanisms.

2. **First lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented). Its main conclusions and recommendations are presented (10 minutes)**

   Lessons learned from working at the grassroots level

   - Importance of reaching out to grassroots groups and involving them in development
   - Mechanisms of effective access to grassroots groups
   - Benefiting from the ideas and innovations of grassroots groups in supporting SDA2030
   - Mechanisms of managing networks at the grassroots level
   - Requirements of advancing grassroots groups , gaining their support for positive partnership and participation in development
   - Recommendations for the future

3. **Second lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented) 10 minutes**

   Lessons learned from national, sub-national /local and regional networking in support of sustainable development.

   - Importance of networking in providing a space for civil society's work
   - Lessons on innovative ideas in effective networking
   - Linkage mechanisms among local networks and their support by regional networks
   - Success stories for areas networking and its support mechanisms
   - Practical experiences on the benefits of networking in supporting the slogan "A development that leaves no one behind"
   - Recommendations

4. **Third lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented) 10 minutes.**

   Lessons learned on how to find out opportunities available to civil society and establishing a positive relationship with the public sector.

   - Space available to civil society and ways of expanding its scope of work.
   - Mechanisms of building a positive relationship with the public sector based on complementarity.
   - Program related recommendations from practical experiences for supporting a positive relationship between the public sector and civil society.
   - Practical lessons on the capacity of civil society in conflict areas and the complementary role of civil society to public sector role.
   - Practical lessons on the ability of civil society to fill the vacuum resulting from poor response by public sector.
   - Practical lessons on the ability of civil society to reach out or access grass root groups.
   - Recommendations for the future.

5. **Fourth lateral paper (distribute to participants but not presented) 10 minutes**

   Lessons learned in funding development locally, nationally and internationally.

   - Challenges of funding civil society in the Arab Region.
   - Lessons learned from practical experiences in finding additional funding opportunities for civil society.
   - Lessons learned from practical experiences in funding local development.
   - Lessons learned from practical experiences in funding development in partnership with the private sector (mechanisms of benefiting from social responsibility)
   - Recommendations for the future.

B. Second Session

Monitoring progress in implementing sustainable development goals: role of civil society

The session includes one main paper and 4 lateral interventions

1. **Main paper (20 minutes. UNFPA bears the cost of this paper) discusses the following themes :**
   - Evaluating the monitoring of the MDGs and the challenges of monitoring the SDGs in the Arab Region
   - Framework of monitoring the international development agenda and challenges of conference related commitments.
   - Available statistical capacities and securing needed data
   - Quantitative and qualitative aspects of progress monitoring
   - Adjusting national monitoring processes to the regional and international levels.
   - Role of civil society in monitoring progress and enhancing transparency.
   - Recommendations.

2. **First lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented) Main conclusions and recommendations of the intervention presented at the session (10 minutes).**
   Lessons learned from monitoring development between official statistical indicators and qualitative studies.
   - Importance of mixing between quantitative and qualitative studies
   - Lessons learned on how to analyze quantitative and qualitative indicators in progress monitoring
   - Role of civil society in enhancing statistical analysis of monitoring indicators
   - National and regional mechanisms for progress monitoring
   - Writing national reports and ways of improving them to produce better monitoring
   - Recommendations for the future

3. **Second lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented). Main conclusions and recommendations of the intervention presented at the session (10 minutes).**
Lessons learned with regard to statistical capacities of official agencies and civil society institutions.

- Human resources available for data analysis and evaluation of achieved progress
- Challenges of needed knowledge and skills.
- Challenges of access to data and information
- Challenges of supportive environment for enhancing professionalism and transparency and providing official statistics as a public commodity
- Abiding by professional criteria and international standards in managing information and statistics
- Role of civil society in enhancing skills and strengthening statistical accountability in monitoring sustainable development.

4. **Third lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented) Main conclusions and recommendations of the intervention presented at the session (10 minutes).**

Lessons learned concerning monitoring and follow up mechanisms during crises and humanitarian situations.

- Space available to civil society to provide data about monitoring during humanitarian crises
- Ability of civil society to provide relevant information and data
- Partnerships with official agencies in the midst of humanitarian situations for the sake of providing monitoring information
- Writing national reports on progress monitoring
- Importance of supporting the capabilities of civil society in integrating , classifying and summarizing data from different sources to the benefit of monitoring humanitarian and conflict situations
- Recommendations for the future.

5. **Fourth lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented) Main conclusions and recommendations to the intervention presented at the session (10 minutes). Issues and innovations in monitoring progress and the role of civil society**
   - Lessons learned on unstructured data in monitoring progress
   - Lessons learned about analyzing unstructured data and its ability to monitor progress
   - Lessons learned on using technology in accelerating the provision of information and data for progress monitoring
   - Lessons learned on the role of civil society and research institutions in creating new means and analyses that contribute to goals measurement and monitoring
   - Lessons learned on the importance of integrating quantitative and qualitative indicators lists in progress monitoring
   - Recommendations for the future

C. Third Session

Innovations and partnerships to support implementation of sustainable development goals. The session includes one main paper and 4 lateral interventions.

1. **Main paper (20 minutes. QSWF bears the cost of preparing this paper).The paper discusses the following themes:**

   - Evaluating traditional methods of implementing the MDGs agenda, and the importance of finding new methods
   - Partnerships between civil society , private sector and public sector that serve the implementation of sustainable development agenda
   - Value added of partnerships during the SDA 2030 period
   - The importance of partnerships in addressing humanitarian situations while implementing SDA2030
   - Some lessons learned from international experiences in establishing

successful partnerships , and the determinants of successful partner ships

- Governance of regional and national partnerships
- Funding partnerships that serve the SDA2030
- Specifications of partnerships within a framework of rights agenda that leaves no one behind
- Recommendations

2. **First lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented). Its main conclusion and recommendations presented at the session (10 minutes). Partnerships at the local and national levels**

- Lessons learned on partnerships at the local level.
- Ways of establishing and maintaining development partnerships that serve the social sector.
- Governance of partnerships at the local level.
- Successful models of partnerships that were able to realize goals that serve grass root groups.
- Coordination among partnerships and coalitions in the service of sustainable government.
- Recommendations for the future.

3. **Second lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented). Its main conclusions and recommendations presented at the session. (10 minutes)—New innovations for building successful partnerships**

- Lessons learned from innovations in establishing development partnerships.
- Challenges facing the establishment of innovative partnerships
- Initiatives that deserve looking at and learning from.
- Innovative working methods for accessing different grass root groups and engaging society.

- Pioneer international experiences in new innovations for establishing partnerships among civil society networks.
- Recommendations.

4. **Third lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented). Its main conclusions and recommendations presented at the session (10 minutes).**
Lessons learned on new innovations for making the citizen a goal and a partner in sustainable development

- Bottom –up Approach.
- Importance of involving citizens in development.
- Lessons learned on mechanisms of engaging marginalized groups.
- Lessons learned on mechanisms of integrating youth and involving them in the governance of development.
- Lessons learned on forums of youth, women and marginalized groups and their role in creating participatory bottom-up development.
- Recommendations for the future.

5. **Fourth lateral paper (distributed to participants but not presented). Its main conclusions and recommendations presented at the session (10 minutes). The private sector and sustainable development partnerships**

- Lessons learned on the role of the private sector in development
- Lessons learned on determinants of partnerships with the private sector
- Lessons learned on governance of private sector social responsibility towards implementing a rights based agenda
- Lessons learned on the contribution of the private sector to innovative partnerships that consolidate the rights aspect in implementing SDA 2030
- Recommendations for the future

3. Fifth Session (Plenary):

Presenting the Arab Decade for Civil Society Organizations 2016-2026 (Presented by the League of Arab States)

- Presenting the conclusions of working groups
- Thirty minutes discussion that could be extended to one hour if participants want to know more about the outcomes
- Reviewing the overall summary of conference proceedings
- Closing Session (Summary of recommendations) – Doha Declaration (To be read out)
- Speeches by partner organizations and announcing end of conference.

Media Event

After the closing session a TV programme, covered by Al Jazeera, will be aired on Agenda 2030 and prospective role of Civil Society in Arab countries. The programme will be interviewing QSWF, UN partners, LAS, local sponsors and some participants.