



Spotlight on Sustainable Development Goals in Jordan

Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies

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Overview

Jordan is officially committed to the 2030 Agenda and to leaving no one behind. The Government of Jordan has presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High Level Political Forum during the July 2017 session. Central to this decision was the need to benefit from the national negotiations, and not only from the report produced. ⁽¹⁾ In addition, through its participation, Jordan aspires to further strengthen national ownership of the 2030 Agenda, build a proactive momentum around it, and accelerate its realization. The process of preparing the voluntary review was led by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) as the focal point for SDG implementation in Jordan, under the direct supervision of the Higher National Committee on Sustainable Development with support from the United Nations Country Team in Jordan, government institutions, regional agencies, and Civil Society Organizations (CBOs).

However, since Jordan submitted its first VNR, the Higher National Committee on Sustainable development has not met yet, and there have been no national dialogues or collaboration between government and civil society to discuss how Jordan can move forward in implementing the SDGs. There was a gap between what was indicated in Jordan's first VNR and the implementation on the ground. Jordan was supposed to achieve the SDGs in issues of reducing poverty rates and unemployment rates, raising levels of education and health care, and achieving sustainability in the use of natural resources, as well as the requirements for empowering women, youth and citizens in general, nevertheless, what was achieved was really shocking and affected the achieving of the SDGs negatively, which in turn affected all development sectors depressingly. ⁽²⁾

Achievements, Challenges, and Opportunities

Achievements

The government of Jordan has developed a roadmap to fostering ownership, implementing the Sustainable Development Agenda and achieving the SDGs, the objectives of this roadmap is to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals, targets, indicators and means of implementation, furthermore, mainstreaming SDGs within national plans at governorate and municipality levels, strengthening national statistical systems and availability of data, Gender mainstreaming, and further strengthening of institutional mechanisms and enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems.⁽³⁾ The roadmap is considered an important tool for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda and it is regularly reviewed and refined as part of the overall monitoring of national development plans and mechanisms by MOPIC.⁽⁴⁾



In 2015, Jordan's "Vision 2025" for economic and social development was developed and launched by the government, this document features a long-term vision for Jordan's economy that includes over 400 policies and measures to be implemented by the government, private sector and civil society to support economic development in the coming decade.⁽⁵⁾ The most important goal that the vision seeks to achieve is improving the welfare of citizens and the basic services provided to them to create a balanced society where opportunities are available to all and the gap between governorates are bridged.⁽⁶⁾

In order to enable Jordan to monitor the implementation of the SDGs and its indicators, a Sustainable development unit was established as part of Department of Statistics (DOS) to lead the coordination between the various sections of the Department, internal partners, and international organizations to integrate the concept of Sustainable Development in an easy and simplified manner into the work of different departments and sections. The unit also works to identifying data gaps through creating methodology and mechanisms for future availability of unavailable data in cooperation and coordination with all internal and external partners. Besides, it is responsible on submitting a detailed technical report about the indicators of sustainable development annually.⁽⁷⁾

The Jordanian civil society also played an important role in achieving the Sustainable Development and considered an essential partner in achieving the SDGs, especially after the Jordanian government has become unable to fulfill all the needs of citizens, in terms of quantity and quality. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Jordan developed an effective mechanisms for their work, a clear organizational structure, and transparent and flexible administrative systems. Their role becomes larger and more effective and influential in the development process, the diversity of CSOs in terms of experience and expertise created a rich source that leads to a good combination contributes effectively to achieving Sustainable Development.

After three years of submitting Jordan's First VNR and in order to bring together the various national stakeholders who play a fundamental role in developing this report and the implementing the 2030 Agenda, Phenix Center for Economic Studies in collaboration with Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) conducted a virtual Multi-Stakeholder National Dialogue in September 2020 to assess the implementation of the Agenda 2030, and to identify the key sustainable development challenges and gaps. During the session, Phenix Center and Justice Center for Legal Aid (JCLA) presented their best-practices towards the implementation of Agenda 2030 at the national level.



The Sustainable Development Report 2020 was released by the United Nation to describe country's progress towards achieving the SDGs and indicates areas requiring faster progress. As indicated in the report, COVID-19 pandemic has touched all segments of the population, all sectors of the economy, and all areas of the world. Not surprisingly, it is affecting the poorest and most vulnerable people the most. ⁽⁸⁾ One of report's findings was that Jordan's global SDG rank was 89 of 166 countries in 2020 with only four SDGs on track or maintaining SDGs achievement. These goals are: goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), goal 7 (affordable and clean energy), goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and goal 13 (climate action).⁽⁹⁾

Challenges

The rate of progress towards achieving SDGs in Jordan is insufficient, In spite of some achievements on the national level, Jordan will likely miss all goals by 2030 at the current pace of progress. There is a need to fast-track progress or reverse negative trends regarding all SDGs to achieve the ambition of the 2030 Agenda. At the current rate of progress, no goal is likely to be met by 2030, progress is going in the wrong direction, and there is a lack of partnership and collaboration among national institutions in general. Moreover, the role of civil society is marginalized and controlled by the government.⁽¹⁰⁾

The implementation of the SDGs at the national level has not been achieved as required due to a several challenges. The discussions and consultations between the government and other national partners who play a key role in achieving the SDGs are missed, the role of civil society is ignored, and national priorities and plans has proven its failure particularly after COVID-19 pandemic. ⁽¹¹⁾ The number of SDGs indicators available in DOS database are only 101 out of 241 indicators, which affects the monitoring process of measuring the achieved SDGs negatively. Gaps in technical capabilities, insufficient funding, and the lack of private sector engagement are the main challenges that face DOS in obtaining a solid database for Indicators of SDGs.⁽¹²⁾

The impact of Syria crisis on the socio-economic context is still a challenge for Jordan. The crisis affected economic growth, trade, exports, tourism and investment, in turn leading to an increase in the budget deficit and public debt. The annual direct cost of hosting Syrian refugees in the kingdom amounts to approximately USD 2 billion while the annual indirect costs are estimated to be USD 3.1-3.4 billion.⁽¹³⁾



Jordan's first VNR indicated that there will be an efforts to achieve issues of reducing poverty rates, reducing unemployment rates, and raising levels of education and health care, which didn't happen in the reality. Official statistics in regards to the healthcare in the country showed that only 77% of Jordanian citizens are covered by health insurance pension. While data on goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth) shows that more than 40 percent of Jordan's total employment is in the informal sector. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Moreover, the latest statistics available (prepared by the International Labor Organization in cooperation with the Department of Statistics and the Ministry of Labor) shows that more than 70 thousand children in Jordan are engaged in child labor, 45,000 of whom work in dangerous occupations.⁽¹⁵⁾

As for the role of CBOs in the development process, it is noticeable that there are many challenges facing CSOs and preventing their effective participation in achieving the sustainable development, such as the absence of coordination between the government and CSOs due to the lack of communication between decision-makers and CSOs management. CSOs work depends on obtaining the government approval for any project requires foreign funding and the majority of CSOs rely almost entirely on funding from international donors, and some government funding, which affect the nature of CSOs' work.

Moreover, some CSOs achievements that contribute to achieving the SDGs are not measurable. For example and as indicated by Hadeel abdelaziz (CEO of JCLA) in the national multi-stakeholder dialogue conducted in September 2020 to discuss the obstacles to achieving Sustainable Development and the implementation of 2030 Agenda in Jordan, many of JCLA achievements are represented in the legislative amendment body, which is not necessarily reflected in achieving the targeted SDG. In addition, the absence of cooperation between legislative and executive authorities in the passing of laws related to the work of CSOs, lack of coordination between CSOs, and lack of awareness and understanding of the role of CSOs by society and official authorities similarly hindering the effective participation for those CSOs in achieving their targets.⁽¹⁶⁾

COVID19- Crises ... Current and Future Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts are growing rapidly. As the pandemic has not only affected the development process negatively, it is also impacted the nature of the government response in terms of movements restrictions and other emergency measures and the reaction and support of Jordan's key development partners. By mid-March, Jordan had closed all schools, universities, workplaces and mandated cancellation of events in order to control the spread of the virus. Travel restrictions were widespread. The mandatory lockdowns, together with social distancing by consumers and producers, have destroyed Jordanian economic activities and trade.



Since Jordan's economic growth is more affected during the pandemic than other development sectors, below is a snapshot on the impact of COVID-19 across SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth):

- The COVID-19 pandemic poses immediate significant downside risks to Jordan's economic recovery. Jordan's GDP contracted by 3.6 percent in the second quarter of 2020 compared with the same quarter of 2019. Official figures showed that the quarterly estimates indicated that most sectors of the economy showed contraction in the second quarter. However, the hospitality sector was the most hard-hit by the slowdown, contracting by 13.4 percent, followed by the following sectors: transport, storage and telecommunications (-9.2 percent), social and personal services (-6.4 percent), construction (-6.3 percent), and manufacturing industries (-5.3 percent).⁽¹⁷⁾
- COVID-19 induced sharp drop in capital flows to Jordan as its main source of foreign direct investment from Arabian Gulf countries dwindles due to lower income from oil⁽¹⁸⁾. This could constrain the government's ability to further scale its social safety nets, stimulate demand, and provide subsidy and support to food producers.
- Globally, according to ILO estimates, full or partial closings affect nearly 2.7 billion workers. Nationally, 1.4 million workers, representing about 81 percent of the workforce in Jordan, will be affected by the complete or partial curfew⁽¹⁹⁾
- The unemployment rate in Jordan increased to 23 percent in the second quarter of 2020 from 19.2 percent a year earlier. It is the highest jobless rate since at least 2005. The unemployment rate rose for both males (21.5 percent from 17.1 percent) and females (28.6 percent from 27.2 percent).⁽²⁰⁾ Before the COVID-19 crisis, unemployment rates among youth was between 42 per cent and 52 per cent. Today, the figures are between 47 and 58 and this is a double challenge for the youth and empowerment.⁽²¹⁾
- A variety of data was produced in order to better understand the economic picture for Jordan during the COVID-19. One of the most recent data by ILO and Fafo⁽²²⁾ show that almost half (47 per cent) of the respondents who were in employment before the COVID-19 outbreak, were currently out of work. Out of these, 13 per cent had been permanently dismissed, while 18 percent had been temporarily laid-off and 16 per cent were on paid leave.
- The pandemic has worsened pre-existing issues. Only 22 percent of domestic workers have access to social security, meaning no paid sick leave, employment injury benefits or unemployment insurance. Almost half of domestic workers earn (48.7%) less than 250 JD per month⁽²³⁾, leaving them without savings in case of financial emergency.



- According to a survey study conducted by Phenix Center for Economic Studies, 79 percent of the respondents indicated that they did not benefit from the protection programs provided by the Social Security Corporation during COVID-19 pandemic, and the results indicated that there is no difference between men and women among these levels. ⁽²⁴⁾

- Regarding the effect of COVID-19 and women's employment status, data from ILO and Fafo ⁽²⁵⁾ assessment show that women in the sample were better covered by written contracts, paid leave, social security and regular wage as a result of working in more formal employment than men. Interestingly, the findings reveal that household responsibilities have increased during the lockdown. One of the main reasons that make the coronavirus crisis more severe for women is because they are shouldering much of the burden at home, due to the closure of schools, childcare facilities and longstanding gender inequalities in unpaid work.

- The government employment policies did not target "the real reasons" for Jordanians' reluctance to work in specific economic sectors, the most important of which are agriculture and construction sectors, where working conditions are very low, as well as "the deep imbalances" in the education system that pushed young people to study at university at the expense of technical and vocational education. ⁽²⁶⁾

- The COVID-19 is causing severe disruptions to business activities and revenue generations likely to affect micro and small business disproportionately worse. ⁽²⁷⁾

The Way Forward ...

SDGs are not legally binding, they still serve as an important roadmap regarding potential future policy direction at international, national and regional levels ⁽²⁸⁾. At present, Jordan is still at early stages in achieving SDGs, real change will come when we put a concerted effort into measuring our progress and sharing our results. Challenges of achieving SDGs are numerous, but obtaining reliable data, choosing reasonable and enforceable goals to prioritize and holding the most relevant parties accountable are challenges that the Jordanian government, CSOs, and community need to address in the most urgent manner. ⁽²⁹⁾

Progress is faster when clear priorities are linked to a broad national development vision driven by committed decision-makers. Jordanian government should mobilise staff towards a clear goal without imposing a blanket approach and policy priorities must be properly funded to achieve good results. Sustainable Development cannot be achieved without developing a shared vision and understanding of objectives and mechanisms for the next stages. Creating open discussions with different stakeholders who work on the Sustainable Development Agenda is the best way to achieve Jordan's targets. Accountability, transparency, and fighting corruption should be the main national priorities, as it will give the opportunity for all national institutions and community members to contribute to improving the current challenges, remove all political obstacles that limit the freedom of speech and action, and remove the mistrust between government institutions and CSOs.



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