

Arab Initiative on Governance for Development
(G*f*D)

Theme on

"Citizens, Civil Society, and Public Sector Reform with the Arab Region"

First Regional Meeting of the Working Group

Concept Note for the Meeting

29 and 30 September 2005
Gefinor Rotana Hotel, Beirut – Lebanon

A regional conference was held under the patronage of his Majesty King Abdullah II, in the Dead Sea area in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on the 6th and 7th of February 2005. It hosted a group of Arab countries and launched the initiative "Good Governance for Development in Arab Countries", in conjunction with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The initiative represents a partnership between Arab and industrial countries, and focuses on the exchange of knowledge and experiences in order to promote Arab governance and to enable it to improve its performance to face the challenges of globalization and to meet citizens' needs. The initiative is structured around three main points: public governance, finance and judiciary. It is based on the formation of six regional working groups on the following themes:

1. Civil Service and Integrity
2. Electronic Government and Simplification of Administrative Procedures
3. Governance of Public Resources
4. Provision of Public Services and Regulatory Reform (Relationship between the Private and Public Sectors)
5. Role of the Judicial System and Implementation of Court Judgments
6. Role of the Citizen and the Civil Society in Public Sector Reform

Six Arab countries were chosen to preside together with members of the OECD industrial countries over the regional working groups.

Within the framework of this initiative, the Lebanese government was selected to coordinate the sixth working group on "Citizens, Civil Society and Public Sector Reform", jointly with the European Union. At the invitation of the Ministry of State for Administrative Reform in Lebanon and in coordination with the UNDP, the first meeting for this working group of several Arab countries will be held in Beirut on the 29th and 30th of September 2005. The aim of this meeting is to provide a regional framework for the interaction between representatives of the Arab relevant ministries involved in public sector reform, heads of the civil society organizations (NGO), and experts in the public sector reform and in the relationship of citizens with the public administration.

The meeting will address the challenges of public sector reform in the Arab countries and the means for its development following examples of international experiences on the basis of the participation of all concerned persons - in particular citizens and civil society organizations- in improving the performance of the public sector and providing citizens with the best services. Furthermore, the meeting will outline successful experiences of Arab and European countries in this respect. It will subsequently discuss suggestions for improving citizens' and civil society organizations' contributions to the establishment and development of the policies and services of the public sector in Arab countries. These suggestions will be the basis of a draft reform action plan to be developed in the light of national studies and meetings carried out at a later stage by the Arab working group.

First, the meeting will consider ways of improving citizen participation in public sector reform, which includes:

- Good treatment of citizens: simplification of administrative procedures, provision of high-quality services of all kinds, respect of professional ethics by employees and fair and objective attitude towards citizens.

- Determination of the citizens' obligations: including the respect of employees, no recourse to power abuse or to bribes in the process of their administrative procedures, disclosure of any contravention or fraud, settlement of due fees and taxes, compliance with the public administration regulations, and respect of public properties and premises.
- Citizens' access to relevant information: including public documents, formalities and procedures, public sector programs, work procedures of ministries and public administrations, and budgets of public administrations, institutions and municipalities, through different means such as reception offices, publications, information campaigns and websites.
- Acknowledgement of the citizen's right to recourse: specifically by giving all citizens the right to initiate legal proceedings, reducing deadlines for judgment pronouncement, acknowledging citizens' right to file petitions to the public institutions, and putting in place complaint offices within the different administrations as well as ombudsmen.
- Consultation with the citizen: via public bodies within the ministries, public administrations, committees or associations composed of citizens; via surveys and referenda carried out by state on the public sector policies and their impact on people; and through the establishment of a system allowing citizens to submit their proposals in order to improve the administrative work.
- Promoting citizens' participation in public policies and services: for instance, through their participation in conferences on public services, their invitation to test new services and organization of cooperation projects between municipalities and citizens to offer public services.

In addition, the meeting will discuss means of encouraging civil society organizations to participate in the public sector reform. Such participation requires:

- Improvement of the relationship between state and civil society organizations, by facilitating the access of the civil society organizations to permits, giving them rights that allow the efficient practice of professions within a fair legal framework, supporting them financially and morally, and prompting them to fulfill their obligations towards society and the state.
- Support of consultation with civil society organizations on legislation and formulation of public sector policies, by activating the role of Consultative Councils and the Economic and Social Councils, organizing workshops and seminars, forming working groups between governmental and non- governmental parties, providing civil society organizations with government project and law proposals, and inviting them to discussions of parliamentary and ministerial committees.
- Enabling civil society organizations to participate in the delivery of public services, by setting up regulatory frameworks for this participation as follows: drawing up national and sectoral plans for distributing tasks among service providers, providing the relevant organizations with financial support, administrative facilities and training programs, setting up networks of non-governmental organizations that provide services within the same sector such as health, education, environment sectors and others.

At the end of the meeting, an analytical framework will be drawn up for citizen participation in public sector reform, and for involving civil society organizations in the establishment and development of public sector policies and services. After being discussed and approved, the framework will be a reference for diagnostic surveys in the Arab countries for all aspects of the relationship between citizens, civil society organizations and the public sector. At further meetings, the results of these surveys will be presented and the draft reform action plan adopted by the working group on "Citizens, Civil Society and Public Sector Reform" will be discussed.