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**UN Compilation Report: Saudi Arabia
Section L: The Right to Development**

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Section L: The Right to Development

Part I. Background

1. The 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development (RtD) marked its 25th anniversary in 2011, a historical year with civil society around the world calling for a form of development that better addresses concerns of accountability, equity and inclusion. This agenda for change has also had resonance with policy makers and development practitioners in Saudi Arabia, emerging in response to deficiencies within the standard model of development which has often resulted in challenges of exclusion and inequity for the vulnerable in society.
2. The RtD framework is an important reference point, with civil society increasingly envisaging a form of development in line with the RtD framework, as “a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting there from”.¹
3. If there is one lesson from events in the Arab region since the 1st UPR, it is that development is about more than improvements in average socio-economic indicators such as general access to income, health and education.² In Saudi Arabia, vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, migrants and religious minorities, increasingly express their need for more equitable and rights-based approaches to development. Expectations are emerging for more balanced development in which “[a]ll human rights and fundamental freedoms are indivisible and interdependent; equal attention and urgent consideration should be given to the implementation, promotion and protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights”.³
4. Development is about more than charity and achieving minimum levels of social welfare; it is also about issues of inclusion, accountability and justice and it is these more contentious aspects of the RtD agenda that have emerged as central issues of focus. The RtD calls for a shift in development discourse from an orientation on needs and charity, to one focused on citizen rights, state responsibilities and cooperation.
5. As noted by the UN Common Country Strategic Framework in Saudi Arabia (2012-2016), a human rights based approach is built around the explicit identification of rights-holders (people) and duty-bearers (government) responsible for together delivering on national development goals.⁴ Such an approach in the Kingdom can move development policies and results from the realm of charity to a more measurable and enforceable realm based on accountability.

¹ UN, *Declaration on Right to Development*, UN General Assembly Resolution 41/128, 4 December 1986, Prologue. New York (1986).

² OHCHR, *Towards Freedom from Fear and Want: Human rights in the post-2015 agenda*, UN System Task team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, Geneva, at 3 (2012).

³ *Ibid.*, Art. 6 (2).

⁴ UN, *Common Country Strategic Framework in Saudi Arabia (2012-2016)*, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator, Riyadh(2012).

Part II. Situation Analysis

6. In the years since the 1st UPR round in 2009, voices have arisen in Saudi Arabia for greater accountability, equity and inclusion in the process and results of development. Despite the overall positive trends in aggregate socio-economic indicators of development, gaps exist in moving to a more rights-based model of development. Calls for more accountable and participatory decision-making are on the rise, as are calls to address issues of equity and exclusion for vulnerable groups like women, youth, religious minorities, and expatriate workers.
7. *Inclusion and accountability in development:* The years since the 1st UPR have seen rising aspirations among vulnerable groups in the Kingdom seeking a more inclusive and accountable form of development. This includes increasingly vocal calls for women's rights in recent years, resulting among other things in emergence of a new women vote policy under which women are expected to stand as candidates and vote in the next municipal elections planned for 2015. Saudi youth too have emerged as vocal agents of change within society, utilizing social media, non-governmental foundations, and university platforms to call for an end to corruption, improvement in quality and scope of educational opportunities, and ways to address the right to employment. Political and empowerment of youth and women is increasingly seen as a means of achieving national development goals by engaging the innovative, creative and intellectual strengths of the country's youngest and brightest talents.
8. The years since the 1st UPR have also seen a continuation of serious challenges for creating a more inclusive and accountable context for expatriate workers. Expatriate workers are now a core driver of growth and development in the Kingdom, making up over 86% of the private sector workforce. Low-skilled expatriate workers in particular continue to face challenges of racism, social exclusion and lack of accountability from abuse of power. The plight of female domestic workers is of particular concern as noted in parallel NGO submissions. One sign of progress has been a more positive position by the Kingdom during formulation of the new UN Convention on Domestic Workers in recent years, emergence locally of a new draft labor law in 2012 that if passed would adapt the individual sponsorship ('kafala') system and passport control rules, and a new regulation requiring sponsors to enroll workers in a health insurance plan, just a few efforts among many to address many legal, institutional and social barriers to change.
9. *Sustaining development results:* As noted by the RtD framework, countries have the sovereign right to develop and benefit from their natural resources. Over the years Saudi Arabia has taken large benefit from the export of oil to capitalize an extensive system of social welfare measures achieving aggregate improvements in access to income, health and education. But as per capita energy consumption surges owing to urban-industrial expansion and population growth, a key challenge is to balance today's expanding local use of energy with the need to carry forward the socio-economic benefit of natural assets to future generations.⁵ Among the barriers to reduced energy intensity locally is an extensive system of energy subsidies and emergence over years of a sense of entitlement and a right to low-cost energy. Aspired areas for progress include a new commitment by Government to expand energy efficiency and renewable energy as a means of conserving oil reserves for future generations export revenues. With energy governance at the core of Saudi development, a need has emerged to find a new and forward looking balance

⁵ UN, UN Common Country Analysis, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator, Riyadh (2012).

between the right to affordable energy today and the right to development for future generations.

10. Other key natural resources of critical implications for the future of development in Saudi Arabia are water and arable land. With one of the world's lowest per capita levels of both resources, trends of declining groundwater and arable land bring risks for the future of development. While general access to water and food are secured through investments into local desalination systems and overseas food production respectively, these are increasingly costly means of achieving the right to water and the right to food. In the case of desalination, a highly energy intensive network of desalination systems is emerging as a leading source of local demand for energy, and thereby creating large opportunity costs to future development from reduced oil export potentials. A particular concern is also nexus between decreasing resilience of systems of groundwater and arable land, and the vulnerable communities who inhabit such areas.
11. Another important trend of relevance to water security in the years has been the increasing frequency and severity of impact of rising temperatures, coastal storms and natural disasters. The years since the 1st UPR have seen some of the highest-ever recorded temperatures in Saudi Arabia, while the Red Sea coast of the Kingdom has been witness to devastating events in recent years. Both rising temperatures and more frequent storms have converged in recent years to catalyze greater debate and recognition in society, particularly among a more globally connected youth, of the risks that climatic change bring to human development.
12. As trends of urban-industrial growth continue, and rates of pollution and ecological impact grow, many in society are also concerned with their right to live in a healthy environment. Saudi Arabia also now has one of the world's highest per capita levels of waste generation, with urban-industrial expansion in recent years bringing increasing risks of toxic pollution to water quality and human health. Of particular concern is the impact of rising environmental risks in vulnerable communities, who often feel the brunt of rising pollution impacts, but are least equipped to adapt, recover or contest.
13. *Equity in development*: Another key trend in the years since the 1st UPR of central importance under the RtD framework is the increase of social calls for more equitable distribution of development results and benefits of growth among the Kingdoms' regions. Despite overall positive trends in GDP growth in recent years, including a record 5.7% growth in 2012, and gains registered in diversification of the economy beyond oil exports, gaps exist in the rate of growth, diversification and development benefits among regions, with particularly expressive concerns registered by the southern and eastern reaches of the country, the latter host to the Kingdom's vast oil wealth.
14. Another important issue related to equity in development relates to the growing gap as in other countries between urban and per-urban/rural development trends. While the benefits of high oil export prices in recent years have been seen in increased investments in urban-industrial complexes and new health, education and residential facilities, levels of access for peri-urban and rural communities remains a concern.

Part III. Recommended Actions

15. Building on its membership in the UN Human Rights Council for the 2011-2012 term, and in recognition of the relation between the RtD framework and various challenges emerging for the future of development in Saudi Arabia, an opportunity now exists to address situations of vulnerability in the country and craft a social compact built on principles of accountability, equity and inclusion. Looking ahead, a development model with expanded levels of accountability, equity and inclusion can be of great value to sustaining the Kingdom's hard-won development gains into the future.
16. *Institutions for inclusion and accountability:* Efforts are needed to further develop the systemic, institutional, and individual capacities within National Human Rights Institutions, including the Saudi Human Rights Commission and the Saudi Human Rights Society. This should build on the new Memorandum of Understanding signed between the SHRC and OHCHR in 2012 and the standard models and mechanisms for OHCHR-UNDP capacity development assistance to countries.
17. Building on the undertaking of the Kingdom's first two municipal elections in 2005 and 2011, new capacities should be developed in coming years to achieve the goal of the new women vote policy for the 2015 elections. This can build on cooperation between Government and UNDP in area of electoral assistance in previous elections in 2005 and 2011, and engage specific areas of need in advance of the 2015 municipal elections. This can build on and tailor the experiences from around the world in access of women to electoral processes, and can also be geared towards developing capacities of the new women appointees in the legislature (Shoura Council).
18. New capacities are also needed to empower the role of women and youth in society. One key mechanism will be to finalize and implement the country's first National Youth Strategy, developed with UNDP technical assistance, and engage male and female youth across the country in achieving its goals for more effective involvement in the process of development. Capacities are also needed for social institutions concerned with empowerment of vulnerable groups such as women, youth, minorities and expatriate workers. Initiatives can help develop the institutional capacities of foundations and other institutions engaged in supporting accountability, equity and inclusion for members of such groups.
19. *Capacities to sustain development for future generations:* Efforts are needed to develop and implement new laws, policies and actions plans that reduce the energy intensity of growth. This should include passage of the country's first Energy Conservation Law and its first Renewable Energy Strategy to set the framework and incentives for new public and private actions as well as new institutional capacities to carry forward this agenda such as the new Saudi Energy Efficiency Center whose mandate is being implemented with technical assistance of UNDP. Furthermore, greater efforts are needed to fully adapt development initiatives to scenarios of climate impact and vulnerability, and to support global efforts to help the most vulnerable to climate shocks including small island states and drought prone areas.

20. Capacities are also needed to develop and pass new policies for water conservation, groundwater protection and mainstreaming climate risks into disaster prevention, all issues which will shape the nature of development in coming years and responses for which should prioritize the risks to the most vulnerable in society. Needs also exist to integrate a human rights based approaches into the country's overseas land leasing ventures to ensure that issues of inclusive and sustainable development are addressed for communities hosting food production produced for consumption in the Kingdom.
21. *Policies for equitable distribution of development benefits*: The RtD framework should become an important consideration in development of future National Development Plans (NDP). In design of the 10th NDP (2015-2019), efforts should be made to analyze the various focus areas of development policy from a rights based perspective and set in place implementation and monitoring/evaluation systems that help achieve equity in utilization of the State budget. More inclusive policy formulation processes can also be of great value, including use of the post-2015 consultation process as a means of engaging civil society in setting vision for 10th NDP. In particular, a RtD approach would see greater emphasis on the regional balance of development results among center and regions, and ways to better engage regional actors in development policy planning. This could be achieved through application of rights based criteria in regular national MDG Reports and efforts to develop local HDRs to highlight emerging issues of equity at the local level to inform decision-making.
22. Efforts are also needed to address issues of land use and balance of growth opportunities between regions and between urban and rural communities, through formulation of a new National Spatial Strategy and a new National Rural Development Strategy. Capacities are needed to implement and monitor the level of equity in development results in this regard, including through development of new urban observatory systems as a basis for evidence-based analysis of trends. This can build on the cooperation with UNDP in recent years in design of the NSS, NRDS and pilot local urban observatories in select cities of the country.
23. As one of the few Arab countries present to sign the UN Charter in 1945, achievement of these goals would be an expression of the Kingdom's ongoing commitment to the UN Charter's call to "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom." As the UN's development organization and its lead entity for capacity development on issues of governance, and building on its in-country presence in Saudi Arabia since 1966, UNDP is engaged in various initiatives with Government to help achieve the above goals for more accountable, equitable and inclusive development outcomes.