

Regional Launching Event Arab Voices for a Progressive Financing for Development

Amman, Jordan, 24-26 August, 2025

CONCEPT NOTE

1- Background and Regional Relevance

The Arab region continues to reel under heavy debt burdens, which undermine its capacity to create the conditions necessary for the realization of economic and social rights as well as the right to development. This is because debt repayment in many Arab countries is often carried out at the expense of spending on education, health, food or even decent work and housing.

Public debt in the region has increased sharply over the last decade, reaching a record \$1.55 trillion in 2023—a 2.5-fold increase from its 2010 level of \$606 billion. The region's middle-income countries (MICs)—Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia—held over half of its sovereign debt, which stood at \$801 billion, or %70 of their aggregate GDP in 2023. On the other hand, the region's least developed countries (LDCs)—Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen—face serious debt-related risks, despite having received some degree of debt relief earlier during this decade.

Debt servicing is taking up more and more of government revenue, growing faster than spending on health or investment. In 2023, Arab middle-income countries spent around %15 of their revenue on paying external debt, compared to just %7 in 2010. This puts extra pressure on their budgets and leaves less money for important public services and development goals, especially in countries like Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia.

Another aspect of the public debt profile in the region is that the composition of Arab countries' external debt has changed significantly over the years. The rise of external debt of Arab countries—especially MICs—has been accompanied by a shift from official to private creditors, notably commercial banks, and to international financial institutions (IFIs). Importantly, the increasing role of private creditors in the region's debt landscape not only means costlier external debt service, but also elevates risks related to exchange rate fluctuations or negative trade balance shocks.

This is because private creditors have the tendency to withdraw their investments at the earliest signs of an impending crisis, putting pressure on national currencies. But also, private creditors may have fewer incentives to provide flexible terms or to participate in debt restructuring agreements during times of economic distress, constraining a country's policy space and limiting its ability to implement counter-cyclical policy measures.

When it comes to debt management in the Arab region, much like in many developing countries, it has traditionally been treated as a technical issue, particularly by international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and the World Bank. The primary focus has been on restoring repayment capacity, with limited attention given to the social costs, the implications for economic and social rights, or the capacity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, experiences from countries like Argentina and Zambia have shown that restructuring policies implemented without public participation or human rights considerations often deepen poverty, undermine public services, and even destabilize societies. In the Arab context, this approach is especially risky due to fragile economic structures, a heavy reliance on debt and foreign aid, and weak transparency and accountability mechanisms. Several countries in the region have made little progress toward achieving the SDGs, and the financing gap is

expected to persist for decades unless there is a fundamental shift in the region's financial and tax systems. According to the 2024 World Investment Report, the investment gap in developing countries needed to meet the SDGs stands at around \$4 trillion, and it is expected to worsen due to declining international financing. In the Arab region, 14 countries have not yet achieved a single SDG. UNESCWA estimates that, at this pace, the 2030 Agenda could be delayed by up to 60 years.

2- Context and Purpose of the Launch Event

Against this backdrop, the “Arab Voices for Progressive Financing for Development” project was launched to create a constructive dialogue space between relevant stakeholders, including civil society organizations and human rights defenders. The project aims to promote fiscal reforms grounded in justice, participation, and transparency by adopting a rights-based, critical approach. Special attention is given to sovereign debt and tax justice, with calls to rethink current debt management practices and development financing models in order to reduce debt burdens and mobilize domestic resources that better protect societies across the region.

The project also seeks to build a regional knowledge base through national reports on sovereign debt in six Arab countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Iraq), a regional report, and two training manuals: one on sovereign debt from a rights and development perspective, and another on tax justice in the Arab context. A microsite will also be launched to offer accessible knowledge tools and interactive resources to support advocacy and raise public awareness on debt and taxation issues.

This regional meeting marks the official launch of the project. It is a pivotal moment not only to present research findings but also to build political and civil momentum toward stronger alliances that advocate for a fairer financial system, one that restores human dignity and breaks the vicious cycle of debt, austerity, and marginalization.

DAY 1: Monday, 25 August 2025

9:00-9:30	Registration	
9:30-10:00	Welcome Remarks and Overview of the Project "Arab Voices for a Progressive Financing for Development"	<p>Ahmad Awad – Director, Phenix Centre</p> <p>Amenah Al Zubi – President, Jordanian Women's Union (JWU)</p> <p>Ziad Abdel Samad – Executive Director, ANND</p>
10:00-11:30	<p>A Rights-Based Approach to Sovereign Debt in the Arab Region (15 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of the regional report on sovereign debt <p>Mobilizing Finance for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region (15 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of the Innovative Financing Instruments for SDGs and Climate Action <p>Global Dialogue on Financing for Development Post-Seville (15 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key themes emerging around sovereign debt in the context of the FfD4 outcome <p>Discussion and Q&A (45 min)</p>	<p>Hassan Sherry – Consultant, ANND</p> <p>Malak El Baba – Research Assistant, UNESCWA</p> <p>Stefano Prato – Managing Director, SID</p> <p>Moderator: Hala Murad – Director of Dibeem Association</p>
11:30-11:45	BREAK	
11:45-13:30	<p>Launch of National Reports: Key Findings and Recommendations (10 min each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Egypt Iraq Jordan Lebanon Morocco Tunisia <p>Discussion and Q&A (45 min)</p>	<p>Mohammad Ramadan – EIPR</p> <p>Abdulrahman Mashhadani – Al-Iraqia Uni.</p> <p>Ahmad Awad – Phenix Center</p> <p>Khalil Gebrara – Independent Researcher</p> <p>Riad Mekouar – Espace Associatif</p> <p>Amine Bouzaiene – CAJF</p> <p>Moderator: Rabeb Hammammi – ATFD</p>
13:30-14:30	LUNCH BREAK	

14:30-16:00	<p>Manual on Sovereign Debt in the Arab Region: Principles and Tools for Advocacy (20 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of the Sovereign Debt Manual in the Arab Region • Discussion of its application to national contexts <p>Manual on Tax Justice in the Arab Region: Principles and Tools for Advocacy (20 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of the Tax Justice Manual in the Arab Region • Discussion of its application to national contexts <p>Discussion and Q&A (50 min)</p>	<p>Zeina Abla – Independent Consultant</p> <p>Nasr Abdelkarim – Independent Researcher</p> <p>Moderator: Wael Gamal – EIPR</p>
16:00-16:30	Closing Remarks & Overview of Day 2	

DAY 2: Tuesday, 26 August 2025

09:00-10:00	<p>Launch of the Debt & Tax Justice Microsite (15 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walkthrough of the platform's key features <p>Media and Communications for Advocacy and Networking (15 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveraging media tools for policy impact <p>Discussion (30 min)</p>	<p>Hassan Sherry – Consultant, ANND</p> <p>Diala Abdel Samad – Communications Officer, ANND</p> <p>Amenah Al Zubi – JWU</p>
10:00-11:30	<p>From Diagnosis to Action: Confronting Neoliberal Globalization and Mobilizing Arab Civil Society for Debt and Tax Justice (30 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unpacking the structural roots of debt and tax injustice in the Arab region within the context of neoliberal globalization Mobilising civil society through knowledge, networks, and advocacy to influence debt and tax justice across the Arab region. <p>Discussion and Q&A (60 min)</p>	<p>Adib Nehme – Consultant, ANND</p> <p>Moderator: Ahmad Awad – Phenix Centre</p>
11:30-12:00	BREAK	
12:00-13:30	<p>Breakout Sessions: National, Regional and Global Level Application and Reflections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small group discussions by country to identify priorities for advocacy, research, and coalition-building (Each group selects its own facilitator) (75 min) Plenary reporting: Key findings and proposals from breakout sessions (15 min) 	<p>Moderator: Manar Zaiter – ANND</p>
13:30-14:00	<p>Closing Session: Key Takeaways and Proposals for Regional Follow-up</p>	<p>Ziad Abdel Samad – ANND</p>
14:00	LUNCH BREAK	