



SOUTH MED SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Poverty and Inequality in Arab Countries: Reality and Policies

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PREAMBLE

This paper analyzes the reality of poverty and inequality in the Arab countries of the southern Mediterranean and the policies adopted to tackle these two questions. The paper adheres to recognized international scientific research standards, but it is not an academic product in the narrow sense. The goal of the SOLID project (in the context of which this paper was prepared) is to stimulate social dialogue and enable development actors, especially civil society organizations (CSOs) and trade unions, to use its content in dialogue, advocacy, and influencing policies. Based on this practical goal that ultimately seeks social change, the paper avoids unnecessary exaggeration in theoretical analysis without neglecting what is necessary. It also considers the debate with current ideas and perceptions regarding poverty and inequality and appropriate policies to combat them, making the content more suitable for advocacy and dialogue. The paper also focuses on ideas circulating among governments, their ministries concerned with poverty and inequality, relevant regional organizations such as the League of Arab States (LAS), United Nations organizations, and international financial institutions, considered enormously influential actors in building perceptions of poverty and inequality, and in proposing or imposing specific policies to "address" them. It also adopts a critical approach based on the fact that the continuing deterioration in the standard of living and the worsening of inequality are strong indications of the ineffectiveness of the policies followed by

national, regional and international governmental parties, or their significant shortcomings, at the very least.

The paper studies the reality of poverty and inequality at the regional level in general, including the Arab countries for which data are available, with a special focus on the six countries included in the "SOLID" project, namely, **Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Algeria, and Palestine**. These countries fall within the category of countries with a medium level of development and growth and have relations with the European Union. They are all on the Mediterranean (except Jordan). In general, they give a clear idea of the average situation of the Arab region. However, there is a need for more specific research into the situation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the least developed countries (LDCs). Within the group of included countries, there is a degree of diversity in the economic and living situation, the size of the population, the nature of the regime, and the general situation, whether in terms of the occupation in Palestine, the severe and comprehensive crisis in Lebanon, or the political and institutional crisis in Tunisia. Thus, it is possible to monitor the diversity in the issue, policies, the role of actors, and several points of similarity within the broader regional framework, which will be addressed when reviewing international and regional reports or LAS documents on combating poverty.

I. INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL GROUNDS

Like all social phenomena, inequality and poverty are complex with multi-dimensional components and causes. They are also socio-historical phenomena saturated with the specific history of the societies concerned with the study. Moreover, they have a universal character resulting from the nature of the global economic system, especially in light of the prevailing neoliberal globalization that reduces the margin of independence of national policies - especially economic and social ones. Consequently, the international level becomes a decisive factor in formulating national policies and contributes to the evolution of inequality and poverty at the national level.

This paper adopts an integrated development-human rights approach. Such an approach offers alternatives to the narrow neoliberal economic perspective in understanding and interpreting matters. It is also distinguished from this prevailing perspective and subsequent policies - including those of international financial institutions - in its commitment to the human rights system and the values of social justice and equality as the ultimate goal of the desired economy and the specific criteria for the acceptability of economic and social policies.

In practical terms, the paper is based on multiple frames of reference, including the 2030 Agenda as a unified whole. In essence, this is an agenda for alternative policies to address the major challenges facing human civilization, especially the expansion of wars and conflicts, climate change, inequality and poverty, and the re-emerging epidemics that pose new risks to health, life, and society, as witnessed during the COVID pandemic. It is also based on the work of the World Inequality Lab, its reports, and database to assess and study

inequality globally and in Arab countries, as it is considered the most prominent and objective source for studying this phenomenon. Furthermore, the paper adopts a radical and multidimensional approach to defining poverty and studying it in a manner consistent with its nature. It is inspired by the radical criticism presented by the human rights system of the concept of poverty, its definition, and its partial measurement adopted by the World Bank and even some UN organizations. In particular, it benefits from the report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights for 2020 and other research, including what was issued on the level of Arab countries.

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

INTRODUCTION

In the decades preceding the Arab Spring (2011), the prevailing narrative claimed that the Arab countries were among the most equitable global regions in income distribution and the least poor regions of the developing world. This narrative appeared in many UN reports, including the first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) and those of the World Bank. It was accepted and welcomed by Arab governments and researchers working in international institutions. Those affected by its proposals did not object.

The first AHDR in ^[1]2002 said that the Arab countries managed to "dramatically [reduce] poverty and inequality in the twentieth century (p. 11)." It continued that the "MENA countries have had the lowest regional incidence of extreme poverty in recent years" compared to other regions of the developing world (p. 90)" and that income distribution in the MENA region "currently constitutes the most equal income distribution system in the world (p. 90 -

author's emphasis)." Moreover, on the eve of 2011, UN, World Bank, and IMF reports praised the economic and development performance of several Arab countries. These countries witnessed major uprisings a few months later, revealing the politicized and diplomatic nature of such assessments and raising major questions about their scientific credibility.

Examples of traditional narratives about Arab countries

The 2010 AHDR, published by UNDP, said that five Arab countries were among the ten that achieved the fastest progress according to the Human Development Index between 1970 and 2010: Oman (ranked first in the world), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Five Arab countries were also included in the top ten countries with the best progress in non-income related elements. Oman came in first place globally, then the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in third place in the Arab world and fourth globally, then Algeria and Tunisia. The World Bank's 2010 report on Egypt praised the the Egyptian government's success in maintaining the the reform process between 2004 and 2010, saying it had established a solid path of achievements, describing it as one of the "champions" of economic reform in the MENA region. Likewise, the International Monetary Fund's had a positive assessment of Tunisia's economic performance, which carried out "a wide ranging reform program based on improving the competitiveness of the economy, enhancing the business environment and increasing trade openness," and "weathered the [2008] international crisis relatively well."

However, this narrative changed after 2011, and studies by the World Inequality Lab's team (under the supervision of Thomas Piketty) contributed to revealing the harsh truth that the Arab region (MENA in global classifications) is - along with Latin America - the most unequal and with highest concentration of wealth globally. The narrative on poverty also changed with the expansion of criticism of the its international measurement, as a result of the reality of the deteriorating standard of living revealed by widespread protests and the efforts made by local (and global) researchers and activists to present a more objective narrative that expresses the reality of poverty in the region's countries (and around the world).

This paper adopts the new narrative with higher scientific credibility than the old one.

HOW DO GOVERNMENTS DEAL WITH INEQUALITY AND POVERTY IN ARAB COUNTRIES?

The phenomena of inequality and poverty in Arab countries can no longer be denied. Thus, governments and mainstream policy theorists must stop promoting an ideological discourse that covers up the real structural causes of these two phenomena and contributes to justifying the decades-old fragmented and ineffective policies that have not changed after 2011.

The strategies of the the government and their ideologues include four main components:

1. Attempting to play down the magnitude of inequality and poverty through measurements that reduce their importance and give them an alleged scientific character based on international sources and methodologies.

2. Recognizing the traditional, self-evident aspects of these two phenomena, such as the focus on rural-urban disparity as an issue

of global importance or focusing on cases of extreme poverty and marginalization of specific social groups whose low living conditions are indisputably due to certain characteristics (orphans, widows, slum dwellers, people with disabilities, refugees, immigrants).

3. Explaining inequality or poverty by natural factors or those external to the economic system and attributing these phenomena to natural causes (countries with oil wealth and others without), natural disasters (drought, floods, climate change), or human-made disasters (wars) or cultural reasons related to the "essence of our culture" - including religion and social customs - that we cannot sacrifice (for example, the position on equality between women and men).

4. The logical direction of the previous three components inevitably leads to the fourth component, which is adopting policies that deal with the outcomes to address the extreme effects of inequality and poverty, through interventions, programs, and sometimes partial or sectoral policies. Thus, the logic of social assistance prevails, whether in its traditional or modern charitable form (social safety nets), and addressing structural causes is avoided. It also includes applying a moral character to the poverty eradication process, instead of adopting policies based on a rights-based approach and the concept and agendas of sustainable human development.

The above components lead to recognizing the presence of wide regional disparities between oil-rich Arab countries and poor countries (it is a natural, external variable; and rich countries can help poor ones through donations and aid or by investing in projects there). Likewise, governments usually find it easy to acknowledge developmental disparities between the capital, major cities, and the coasts, on the one hand, for example, and the countryside and inland or isolated areas. The matter is

often considered almost natural or merely inherited from the days of colonialism. Thus, governments only require sufficient time to bridge the gap. The same reasoning is applied to some very poor or marginalized groups in relation to "externalities" to the economic system (for example, war, displacement, and asylum). Here, for example, war is considered the most important cause of inequality or poverty and the deterioration of living conditions for large segments of the population (war being an internal and external political cause, not an economic one). Thus, they conclude that stopping war or conflict will automatically solve poverty and inequality.

Similarly in terms of climate change and natural disasters. Their solutions are referred to global levels, such as success in confronting climate change, which is also not primarily the responsibility of national governments. Even when recognizing the existence of poor or marginalized groups of citizens, it is also seen as a natural matter, as it cannot be assumed that there is a society in which specific groups do not need assistance from a social solidarity and humanitarian perspective.

Finally, the cultural intersects into some issues, especially economic and social discrimination against women. In this case, the Arab countries are ranked the lowest globally. However, while this gap is sometimes recognized, its causes are usually considered cultural (especially religious and social). Therefore, governments cannot help and the "West" must accept that the country's government and other influential national parties refuse to abandon an essential cultural component. Consequently, we are limited to dealing with some of the most extreme consequences of such discrimination, not removing its causes, considered cultural and societal to cover up the fact that they are economic and political choices related primarily to material interests and power.

In all the above and regardless of the arguments and pretexts, macroeconomic and social choices and policies, both global and national, that play a role in producing inequality and poverty are ignored. Nonetheless, on the one hand, they generate a dynamic of social and class polarization, coupled with an impoverishment dynamic that, on the other hand, nurtures poverty and exclusion. What is being ignored is the dynamics that generate inequality and poverty, those of polarization and impoverishment, making it seem sufficient to deal with the results and effects to mitigate them. Officials stubbornly reject any attempt to structurally change the prevailing interconnected economic and social policies and replace them with alternative development policies.

III. INEQUALITY IN ARAB COUNTRIES

INTRODUCTION

Inequality has reached unprecedented levels globally, close to its level on the eve of World War I, when it was then among the causes of that war. Global research in this regard indicates that the period between the end of World War II and the early 1980s witnessed a decline in inequality. However, wealth concentration and inequality began to take off sharply with the shift to neoliberal policies that accompanied the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the early 1980s, which continues in its general lines until now. Nonetheless, it is no longer possible to deny this reality, considered one of the most prominent threats to development, peace, and human rights in our current era, as declared by Agenda 2030.

There is no doubt that vertical inequality in wealth (and power) is the backbone of the complex and multi-dimensional

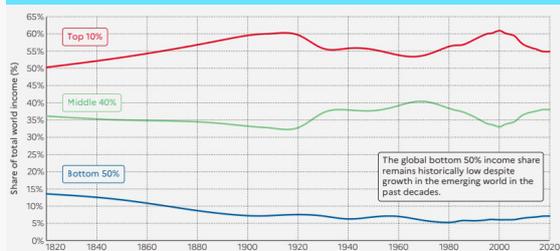
phenomenon of inequality. In recent years, noteworthy attempts have been made to focus on the non-economic and non-class dimensions of inequality in global discourse, in favor of other dimensions, including the most important forms of horizontal inequality (horizontal inequality is a form of inequality that affects social or population groups structured on non-wealth-related criteria) such as gender inequality between women and men; age inequality, disparity, or discrimination against older people, adolescents or children; or discrimination on national, ethnic, religious or sectarian grounds, or against "indigenous peoples." On the other hand, geographical (spacial) disparities (including between the countryside and cities or between the capital and other regions) fall in the middle of a complex that combines the horizontal with the vertical.

All forms of disparity, inequality, and discrimination are significant and constitute a human rights violation, and none should be neglected. However, it seems the prevailing global mainstream discourse entails the danger of slipping from integrated interest in all dimensions of inequality (which is the correct position) to a deliberate shift of interest from the importance and centrality of vertical-economic inequality in wealth and power. This engine generates multiple aspects of horizontal or vertical inequality or reproduces and expands them, instead of overcoming them through societal development. This situation is an additional product of the original position of governments, decision makers, and authorities in refusing to reconsider the economic system's foundations and introducing structural changes to the current order based on a consistent human rights and development perspective.

This paper focuses on reconsidering vertical inequality, especially economic, related to wealth, power, and the social class composition of societies, without diminishing the importance of other

dimensions. It adopts the view that confronting the dynamics of vertical inequality and the polarization of wealth and power in society is the obligatory step towards successfully eliminating other dimensions of inequality, disparity, and discrimination, without claiming that this is done automatically. The paper also refers, briefly and as needed, to two additional dimensions of particular importance: climate change and the disparity in responsibility and bearing its consequences, on the one hand, and gender inequality (between women and men), which also has critical implications in our societies, on the other hand.

Figure 1: Global Income Inequality, 2020-1820

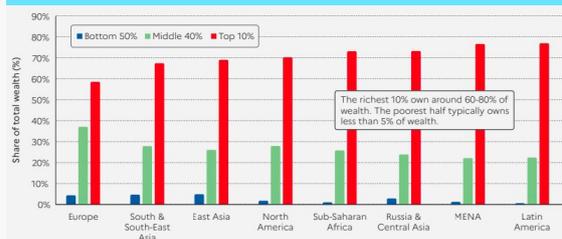


Interpretation: The share of global income going to top 10% highest incomes at the world level has fluctuated around 50-60% between 1820 and 2020 (50% in 1820, 60% in 1910, 56% in 1980, 61% in 2000, 55% in 2020), while the share going to the bottom 50% lowest incomes has generally been around or below 10% (14% in 1820, 7% in 1910, 5% in 1980, 6% in 2000, 7% in 2020). Global inequality has always been very large. It rose between 1820 and 1910 and shows little long-run trend between 1910 and 2020. **Sources and series:** see [wiiw2022.world/methodology](#) and [Chancel and Piketty \(2021\)](#).

PRELIMINARY DATA ON INEQUALITY

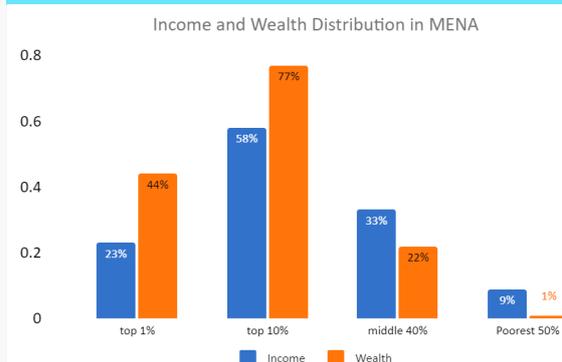
Based on available data,^[2] as of 1980, the share of the highest-income %10 in the world ranged between %55 and %60 of total global income, while the share of the lowest-income %50 was around %5 or slightly more. The share of the bottom half of income has always been low for decades, making it a structural phenomenon in the global and national economies. However, wealth concentration is higher than income concentration, a more significant and critical indicator of inequality. The disparities in the concentration of income and wealth according to global regions are also large, with the share of the bottom %50 of the population in total wealth approaching only %1, especially in Latin America, the Middle East, and North Africa (instead of %5 and %9 in terms of income).

Figure 2: The extreme concentration of capital: wealth and inequality across the world, 2021



Interpretation: The top 10% in Latin America captures 77% of total household wealth, compared with 1% captured by the bottom 50%. Net household wealth is equal to the sum of financial assets (e.g. equity or bonds) and non-financial assets (e.g. housing or land) owned by individuals, net of their debts. **Sources and series:** [wiiw2022.world/methodology](#).

Figure 3: Income and Wealth Distribution in MENA (2012)



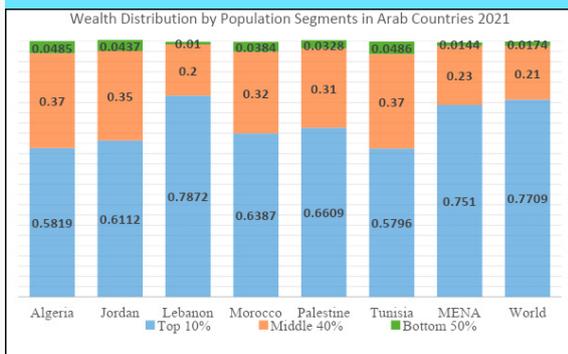
*Source: Author, based on *The World Inequality Report 2022*

In the Arab region (the MENA region according to the closest global classification) and as previously mentioned, the share of the top %10 amounts to %58 of income and %77 of wealth, and of this the share of the top %1 is %23 of income and %44 of wealth. While the share of the bottom %50 amounts to %9 of income and %1 of wealth, as shown in the attached chart (3). Such data means it is necessary to change the prevailing view in simplistic reports that make poverty a limited phenomenon in Arab countries, and still consider that the middle classes constitute most of the population. Polarization in wealth and income indicates the existence of a sharp social and class hierarchy, where the base of the pyramid consisting of the poor and popular classes is very broad, compared to a few people with wealth at the top of the pyramid.

FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE: WEALTH DISTRIBUTION IN SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES^[3]

The distribution of wealth among the three main population segments (top %10, middle %40, bottom %50) was extracted from the World Inequality Database for the six Arab countries included in the SOLID project. The distribution was similar to the regional distribution in general. It ranged between a maximum concentration in Lebanon (the share of the top decile was %79, compared to %1 for the bottom half), and the lowest concentration in Algeria and Tunisia (%58 for the top decile, and %5 for the lower half).

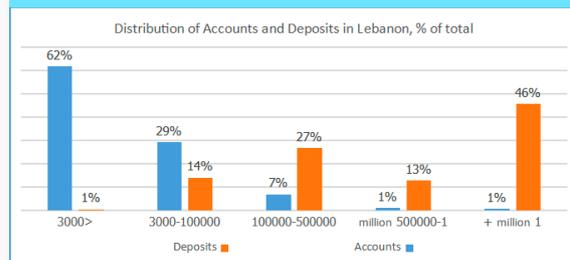
Figure 4: Concentration of wealth by Income Brackets in 6 Arab countries, 2021



Source: Author's calculations based on The World Inequality Report data.

At least for Lebanon, these results could be verified through purely national sources. Detailed data has been published on the distribution of bank deposits in Lebanon according to the deposit's size, confirming the result reached by international reports. According to Bank of Lebanon's sources on the distribution of deposits in 2020 in the country,^[4] %1 of the total bank accounts (whose account value exceeds one million dollars) represents %46 of the total bank deposits, while %62 of the accounts whose value is less than 3,000 dollars represent less than %0.5 of total deposits.

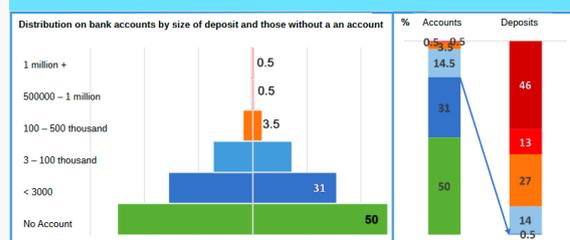
Figure 5: Concentration of Bank Accounts in Lebanon, 2020



Source: Prepared by the author based on the report of the Banking Control Commission of Lebanon (BCCL), 2020.

The percentage of those who have bank accounts in Lebanon ranges between %43 and %48, according to sources, about half of the population (or slightly less). Considering that the concentration of bank deposits reflects the concentration of wealth and adding those who do not have accounts to the %62 of those with small accounts, a bottom segment of approximately %81 of the population constitutes a mere %0.5 of wealth. The share of the wealthiest %1 is approximately %59. These percentages are consistent with World Inequality Lab calculations.

Figure 6: Concentration of bank deposits (and wealth) in Lebanon, 2020



Source: Prepared by the author based on the report of the Banking Control Commission of Lebanon (BCCL), 2020.

These figures, whether from global or national sources, illustrate an ugly picture of real inequality in Arab countries. In particular, the concentration of wealth has reached completely illogical levels, where between half and three-quarters of the population in the lower income groups can easily be considered poor based on a realistic or relative definition of poverty. Therefore, this inequality - and its other forms, especially geographical and gender inequality - is a danger to society's survival (along with other equally important problems such as tyranny, lack of democracy, wars, occupation, and violent conflicts). Thus, combating vertical (and horizontal) inequality be at the core of national policy priorities, including economic and social policies.

GENDER INEQUALITY IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Gender inequality cannot be overlooked given its importance from a civilizational and historical development perspective, globally and in the Arab region. Thus, the World Inequality Database focuses on this type of inequality. In particular, it highlights its interrelation with economic and vertical inequalities, whether in terms of the organic interrelation of the division of labor by gender with the formation of class societies in ancient social history or the current interconnections resulting from neoliberal economic policies, especially in their peripheral forms (such as in Arab societies). It also looks at their differential impact on various social groups, including between men and women and between women according to their economic and social status and class affiliation.

Figure 7: Women's share of labor income globally, 2019 (%)



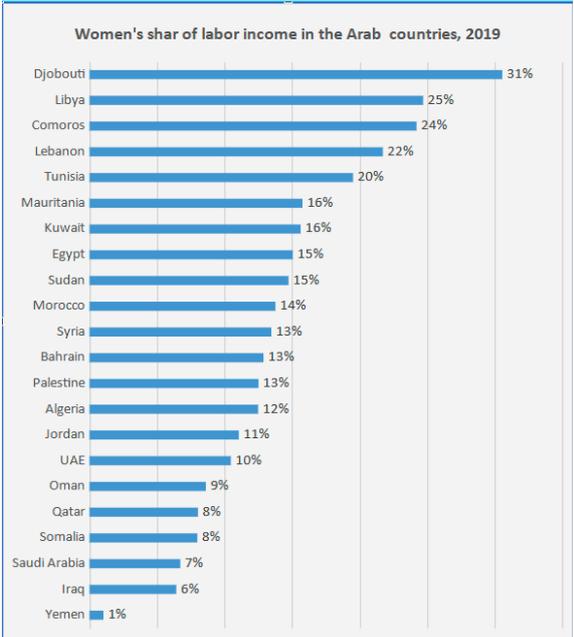
Source: Author's calculations based on The World Inequality Report data

The paper examines this dimension extensively from the perspective of this interconnectedness (which is one facet of inequality and discrimination against women). The data show that the Arab region is ranked lowest in some main gender inequality indicators. Women's share labor income was chosen as a composite indicator to measure economic inequality between the sexes. The Arab region (MENA) comes in last place among other regions of the world. Women's share of the total labor income amounts to only %15, compared to a universal average of %35, with maximum levels of %39 and %40 in some regions.

Looking at the percentage breakdown in individual Arab countries, the proportion in Yemen is very low (only %1) and reaches a maximum of %31 in Djibouti. Furthermore, in 17 of 22 Arab countries, women's share of labor income is %16 and below. Among the low global rankings, there are large disparities between the Arab countries themselves in women's share of labor income that cannot be explained by cultural factors, whether religious or related to social traditions. Rather, the matter involves other factors related to the nature of the economy, the development of the system, economic relations, and the political system over time (the share of women in Iraq in the seventies, for example, was much higher than it is now, while the situation may be the opposite for other countries). It could also be due to demographic characteristics, traditional or

modern social composition, the level of openness of the economy to the global economy, and perhaps the level of development (the least developed countries, except for Yemen and Sudan, have a higher percentage of women’s participation, for example). The difference might also be related to whether the countries are in Asia or Africa.

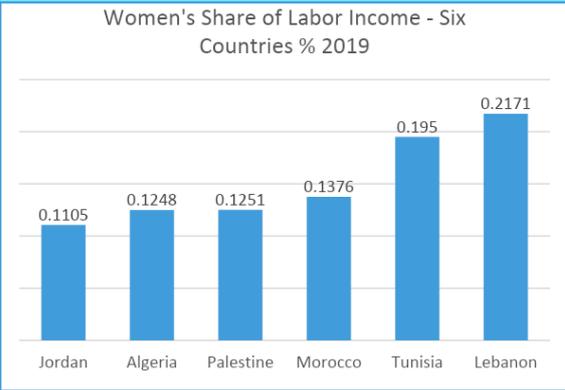
Figure 8: Women's share of labor income in the Arab countries, 2019



Source: Author’s calculations based on The World Inequality Report data.

However, the disparity among the the six countries in the SOLID project is significant. It reaches a maximum in Jordan (%11), Lebanon (%22), and Tunisia (%20), although the six countries are classified as having a medium level of development. On the other hand, Palestine continues to suffer from Israeli settler occupation in practice, despite the presence of two independent authorities in the West Bank and Gaza. Once again, this disparity cannot be explained exclusively by religion or tradition.

Figure 9: Women's share of labor income in the 6 Arab countries, 2019



Source: Author’s calculations based on The World Inequality Report data.

The composite indicator used above combines two variables. The first is the share of women’s participation in the labor force. The second is the wage that women receive in different ranks and professions compared to the average or male wage. A larger percentage of women participating in the labor market leads to an increase in their share of the labor income. However, the share is reduced if they work in marginal sectors or low-income professions and positions.

On the other hand, if the participation of university women in the labor market is higher than the national average or the participation rate of university men, this would improve women’s share of the labor income. Thus, this participation needs to be considered in detail to note the disparity in wages or returns from labor among women within one country, without separating gender from the social-class dimension. Finally, women’s participation in the labor market and at work is often underestimated and the evaluation of care work is usually problematic. Thus, a a point of contention appears between the narrow economic perspective and the developmental perspective, as noted SDG3’s fourth target, related to the division of care work and reconsidering its approach from a macroeconomic, development, and rights perspective.

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

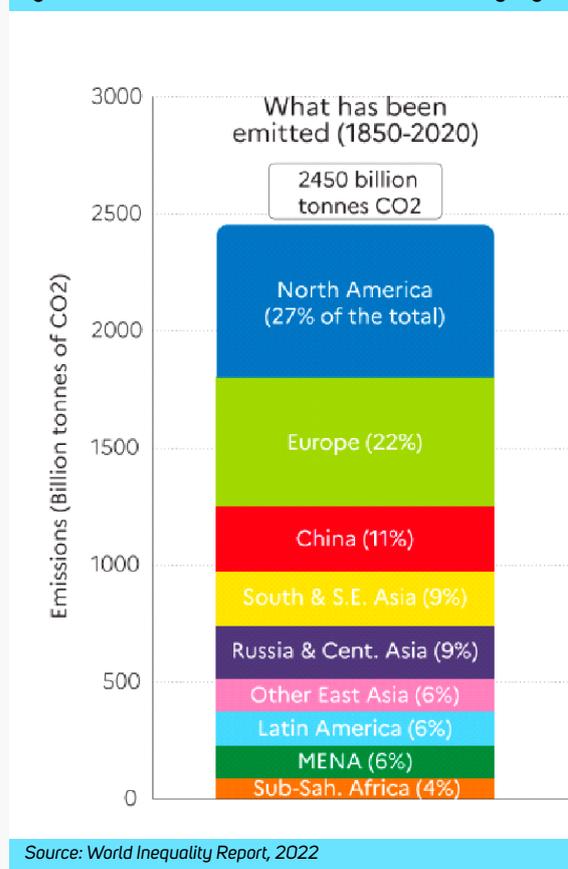
This paper's approach is based on an organic link between the various dimensions of development and addressing the multiple aspects and dimensions of its main questions. However, three distortions must be avoided in dealing with climate change:

1. Being limited to dealing with the results and ignoring the causes, structural dimensions, and historical paths leading to the current situation.
2. Viewing climate change as a global issue that is ambiguous and transcends the policies of national governments, and ignoring the responsibility of national governments to actually and effectively address the issue.
3. Ignoring the global or national interrelationship between climate change and economic and policy choices.

Consequently, serious research in this field organically links climate change with the path of economic and social development since at least the Industrial Revolution. Current climate threats are a cumulative product of the growth pattern in the aforementioned historical period. The current level of danger and the continued failure to confront it is the product of the economic (and political) choices prevailing in neoliberal globalization that are organically printed with inequality between the South and the North and inequality in wealth and power within countries. Today, the countries of the North are responsible for the climate change crisis, its continuation, and the failure to address it globally because they believe it threatens their leadership role in the global economy, which we must read is a threat to the level of profits they achieve through the current pattern of economic growth and globalization.

Between 1850 and 2020, the US and Europe contributed %49 of carbon dioxide emissions. The MENA region's contribution reached %6 due to its lack of contribution to the Industrial Revolution. Its current contribution is relatively high in oil-producing countries: 7.4 equivalent tons per second of carbon dioxide per capita in the region, compared to a global average of 4.8, 6.6 in Latin America, about 10 in Europe and Russia, and about 21 tons in North America.

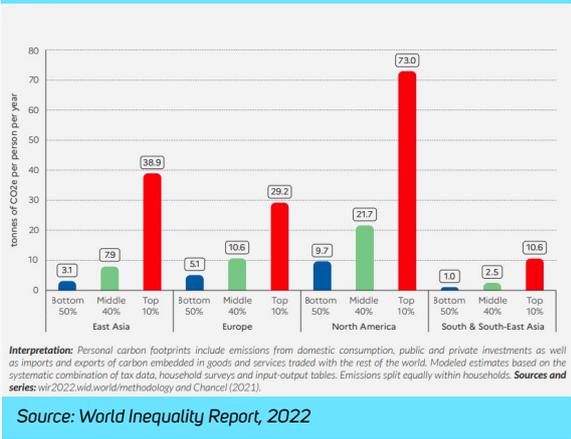
Figure 10: Cumulative contribution to emissions by region



This paper focuses on the interrelationship between climate change and its causes and vertical inequality in wealth. It attempts to show the causal relationship between wealth and the prevailing growth pattern on the one hand, and the contribution to pollution that leads to climate change, on the other. In addition to the great disparity between countries and regions and the associated polluting and wasteful consumer

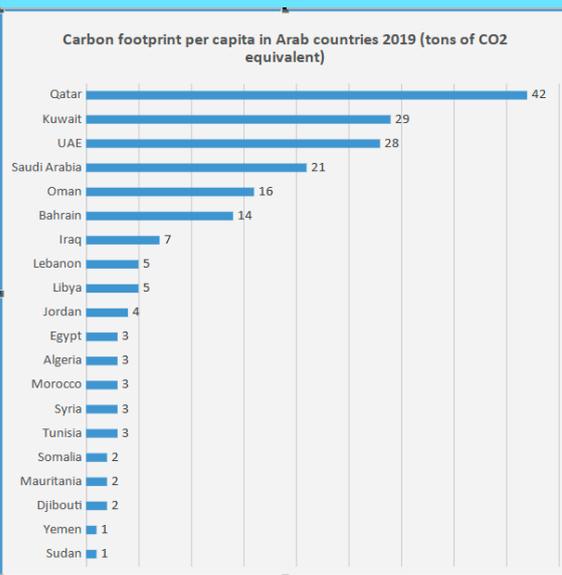
lifestyle (the rate of carbon dioxide emissions in North America is 3 times the global average), the complementary aspect is the disparity within countries contributing to pollution according to wealth. The wealthy are the largest contributors to pollution in all regions without exception. What is striking here as well, as in wealth inequality, is that the rate of contribution of the richest %10 to the rate of contribution of the poorest 50 in the Middle East is the highest among the world's regions, amounting to about 15 times (the contribution of the top tenth is %33.6 of total emissions, and the contribution of the poorest half is %2.3 of emissions).

Figure 11: Contribution to emissions by income/wealth bracket per region, 2019



In Arab countries, the World Inequality Database also highlights the wide disparity between countries contributing to emissions that cause climate change. For example, they range between 42 equivalent tons of carbon dioxide in Qatar and 1 in Sudan and Yemen. In general, emissions are low in poor, non-oil Arab countries, while they are high in oil-producing countries, especially the sparsely populated Gulf countries for obvious reasons.

Figure 12: Per capita carbon footprint in the Arab countries, 2019



Source: World Inequality Report, 2022

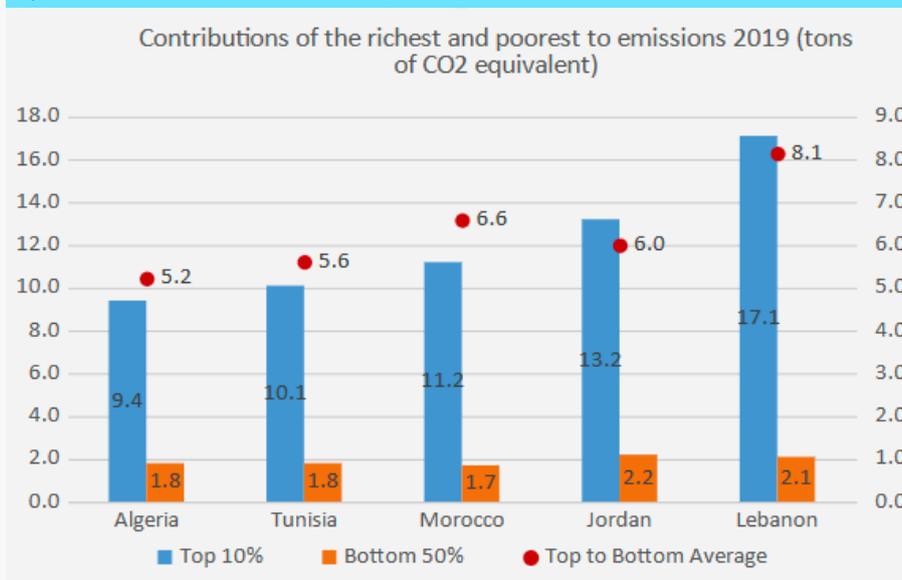
On the other hand, the disparity between the contribution of the rich and the poor to emissions within each country is the same as that at the global level and in all countries.

Of the six countries included in the SOLID project, data is not available for Palestine. Nonetheless, the situation of the other five countries is summarized in the following table (1) and figure 13. Table (1) shows that both Algeria and Morocco have the highest total volume of emissions, and this is due to the larger population compared to other countries, oil production, or the volume of consumption and industrial production in the two countries. The large discrepancy in the total volume does not negate that the per capita emissions are lower in both (due to population size) and in Tunisia than in Jordan and Lebanon. The higher average in Lebanon is due to the level of consumption, especially highly polluting cars and private electric generators and is not due to industrial growth or oil extraction.

Table 1: Emission indicators in 5 Arab countries included in the study

Country	Total Emissions (tons of CO2 equivalent)	Average Per Capita Emission (tons of CO2 equivalent)	Wealthiest %10 Share of Emissions	Poorest %50 Share of Emissions	Ratio of Wealthiest over Poorest
Algeria	138	3	9.4	1.8	5.2
Tunisia	40	3	10.1	1.8	5.6
Morocco	122	3	11.2	1.7	6.6
Jordan	43	4	13.2	2.2	6.0
Lebanon	32	5	17.1	2.1	8.1

Figure 13: Contributions of the richest and poorest to emissions, 5 Arab countries included in the study



Source: Author's calculations based on The World Inequality Report data.

Most significantly, the figures show that the richest %10 are the largest contributor to pollution compared to the poorest half in all countries. The disparity reaches its maximum in Lebanon, where the rate of contribution to emissions for the richest %10 is 8 times the contribution of the poorest half of the population, which is consistent with Lebanon being the country with the most concentration of wealth, as shown earlier. Thus, the interconnection between climate change causes and wealth and economic choices, historically and today, globally and locally, becomes apparent.

IV. POVERTY IN ARAB COUNTRIES

INTRODUCTION

Regarding social dialogue between stakeholders inside each country, addressing poverty and deprivation is often a more acceptable topic of discussion than inequality. Governments find it more difficult to discuss the more complex and difficult issue of inequality, where data are not sufficient or unacknowledged. It could be also because discussing inequality entails discussing polarization dynamics, which complicates the criticism of economic choices and policies. Governments prefer to discuss poverty, in which they are more experienced, whether describing the phenomenon, determining its nature, measurement, or proposing related policies. They are more familiar with an approach founded on social assistance from a welfare perspective, with a touch moral paternalism, fully supported by the directions of the World Bank (in particular) and similar international institutions.

As previously mentioned, the narrative on poverty in Arab countries changed after 2011. That year revealed the wide spread of poverty and deprivation in their various definitions. It exposed the shortcomings of the prevailing international and national measurements that had been promoting very low estimates of poverty in the overwhelming majority of Arab countries, except for the least developed countries, where it was not possible to avoid recognizing the existence of high poverty rates.

This narrative also changed partially globally in the first and second decades of the twenty-first century. It was due to escalating criticism of measuring international poverty (The international poverty line, designed and published by the

World Bank, is globally adopted by international organizations. It was approved to measure progress in achieving the first MDG (2015-2000), and remains one of the adopted indicators to measure progress in achieving the first SDG in the 2030 Agenda).

However, in 2010, UNDP issued the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in the Human Development Report in 2010. It was designed in cooperation with the University of Oxford^[5]. It constituted a frank and direct declaration of the need to go beyond the single monetary measurement of poverty and the concept of the poverty line. The World Bank joined the trend with its own multi-dimensional measurement (MPN - Multi-dimensional Poverty Measure)^[6] as of 2018, influenced by UNDP-Oxford experience on the one hand, and the recommendations of the report of the Monitoring Committee on Global Poverty Measurement chaired by Sir Anthony Atkinson to develop a measure of global poverty commissioned by the World Bank and issued in 2017, on the other.^[7]

These global trends influenced the study of poverty in Arab countries. UN regional committees and offices working in the region followed these new methodologies,^[8] promoting them among governments and issuing regional and national reports that adopted them, including providing recommendations for anti-poverty policies that they inspired. However, the fundamental gaps appeared in this experience, globally and at the Arab level, where it had influence and was imitated in practice. Nonetheless, this change did not lead to significant development in the study and measurement of poverty, neither at the global level, nor in the Arab countries, as much as it gave negative side results. It led to increased confusion in the study and measurement of poverty, as it was not an authentic experience based on regional or national theoretical foundations.

However, other regions had experimented with the issue decades before UNDP-Oxford 2010. They include, for example, building composite indexes to measure poverty in Latin American countries that go beyond a single monetary measurement to a composite of socio-economic indicators. A similar experience in Arab countries led to the creation of the Living Conditions Index, used in several countries. It started in 1998 in Lebanon^[9] and later included Iraq and Jordan and a regional study of six Arab countries. The unique experience provided more objective and logical results from measuring poverty and deprivation in Arab countries consistent with post-2011 realities. Those involved in social dialogue are required to identify some of the problems with a foundational and theoretical nature in defining, studying, and measuring poverty. Governments and advisors - including advisors to international organizations - tend to confine discussion, policies, and solutions within the mainstream, suffering major distortions and minimizing the size and importance of poverty. Their responses are limited to the results, not the causes, especially structural ones, that require reviewing economic and social options at the macro level. Governments and those on their side utilize various means to "persuade" interlocutors from unions, civil society, independent researchers, and those defending the point of view of the poor, deprived, and regular people. These methods include the overuse of statistical data and numbers from various sources, multiple definitions of poverty, measurement methods, and recommendations of international organizations, suggesting the presence of a complex phenomenon, which is difficult for ordinary citizens to understand. They also suggest their proposal has well-known scientific, objective, and universally accepted characters. They are added to cultural-ethical justifications for proposed policies and treatments of a charitable and fragmented nature, as previously mentioned.

Therefore, it is indispensable for dialogue participants to possess the necessary level of knowledge and elements of analysis. Thus, they could be liberated from the prevailing official narrative on the subject of poverty, starting from its definition, all the way to measuring and addressing it. They would also be free from the misleading opinion that considers poverty a natural and limited phenomenon, which is untrue.

Elements that can help build an alternative narrative on poverty

1. Poverty is a universal and qualitative condition that results from the combination of several dimensions of deprivation in one household.
2. Poverty in general is not a temporary condition in a family's life. Rather, it is a characteristic that persists effectively without necessarily being permanent.
3. The concept of poverty line is inadequate and unsuitable for analyzing the phenomenon of poverty. It is a vague, complex and highly politicized concept. Thus, it must be treated cautiously since its uncritical adoption imposes tight restrictions on ideas.
4. Dealing with poverty requires a link between poverty and inequality, absolute and relative poverty, and between the concepts of poverty and deprivation. The separation of any of these concepts from the others in our current era hinders the correct understanding and awareness of causal relationships in studying and addressing poverty, especially when considering it as a product of an impoverishment process with its own context and causes.

5. Poverty has always been a multidimensional phenomenon, but the measurement was unilateral (the monetary poverty line). Thus, there are no two types of poverty: monetary (or income poverty) and multidimensional poverty (the measurement is multidimensional, not poverty). Such an approach requires caution regarding intentional or unintentional misinformation.

6. Attention must be paid to the caveats of expanding the definition and measurement of poverty and using multi-dimensionality to move away from defining poverty as essentially being deprivation in material and ability related to living conditions and quality of life in its broad sense. The focus should not be limited to a partially specific dimension under the pretext of adopting contemporary concepts and going beyond the traditional critical approach.

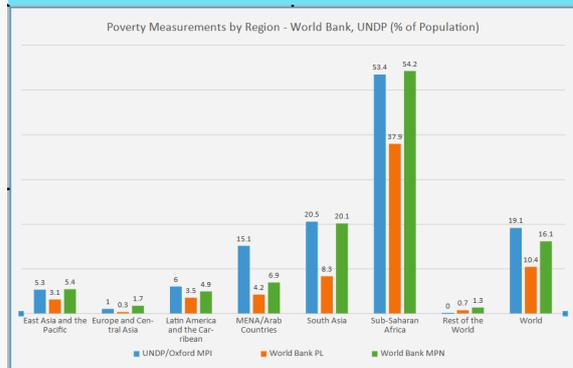
7. The organizations that issue international poverty measurements and reports often aim for international comparisons. Their validity at the national level is very limited. Thus, studying the characteristics of poverty and its national dynamics is necessary as the first basis for evaluating the phenomenon and proposing anti-poverty policies.

EVALUATING POVERTY RATES IN ARAB COUNTRIES

What is the picture of poverty in Arab countries and other regions according to international reports from the two main institutions that issue reports in this regard? They give a very optimistic picture. Today, it most likely repeats the same old narrative. The only exception is Sub-Saharan Africa and partly South Asia (including poor countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka). Other than that, poverty rates are artificially low, whether measured through the poverty line

(monetary poverty, income poverty) or the World Bank's multidimensional evidence (MPN) or the Multidimensional Poverty Measurement Index (MPI), as the next figure shows:

Figure 14: Poverty measurements by region - World Bank and UNDP (latest data available)



Source: Prepared by the author based on the reports of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program - Oxford, for the year 2021.^[10]

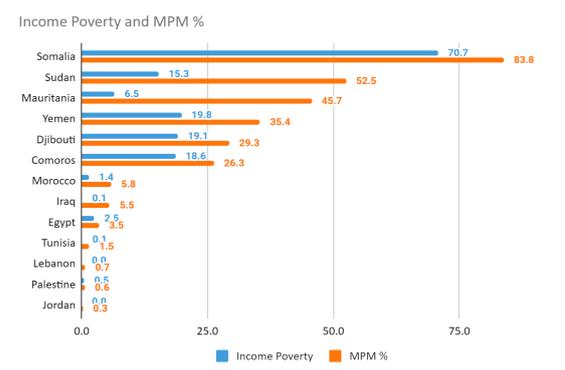
These results suggest that international organizations concerned with measurement adopt a narrow definition of poverty. Therefore, poverty rates in most regions are very low compared to expectations. Indeed, poverty measurement seems to be designed exclusively for the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and partly East Asia with extreme poverty, weak development, and high population densities. However, these measurements seem unsuitable for measuring poverty or deprivation in their most widespread forms in countries classified as having a medium level of development, such as the majority of countries and most Arab countries as well. It does not make sense that poverty rates in most regions are close to 5% (Latin America, East Asia, Europe and Central Asia, and the MENA). Even when this percentage rises slightly in the UNDP-Oxford measurement, it is due to the inclusion of the least developed Arab countries and those suffering from wars and severe conflicts and the exclusion of GCC countries. As is clearly evident from the results, multidimensional measurements give higher values than the monetary poverty line (the World Bank's index is designed to give higher values).

Nonetheless, the shift from singular to multidimensional measurement has not fundamentally changed the evaluation. It remains within the same prevailing narrative. It is not a matter of a technical change in measurement methods, but that of adopted thresholds. These thresholds might be low, whether for the income poverty line or the indicators used to measure the deprivation dimensions that comprise the index. Therefore, the final result remains the same.

POVERTY MEASUREMENTS IN INDIVIDUAL ARAB COUNTRIES

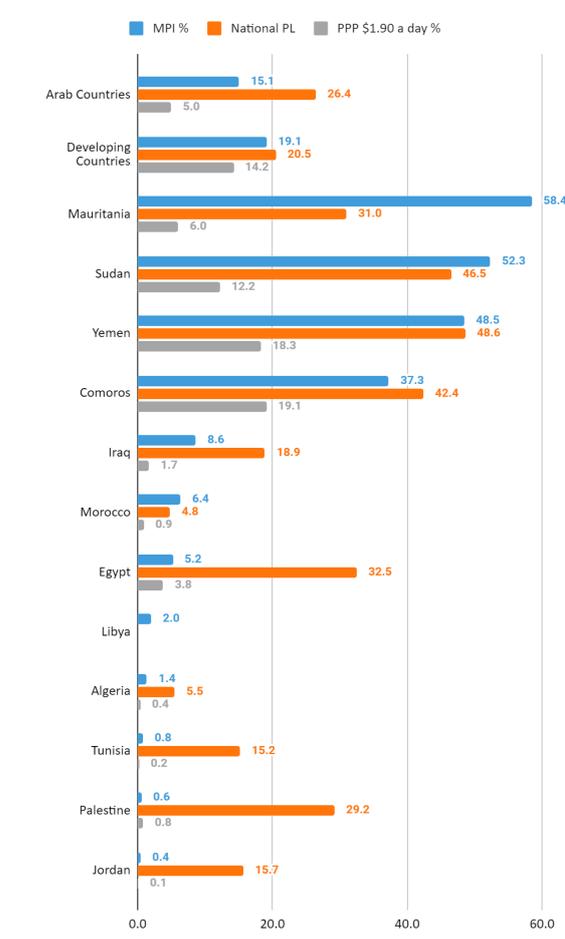
The estimation of poverty rates for each Arab country reinforces the idea that international organizations, which are always partners with national governments in formulating anti-poverty policies and measuring poverty, do not provide objective advice to national parties as much as they promote their production of measurements and the content of reports and policies expressed in anti-poverty programs and projects. Figure 15 displays the World Bank’s measurements for 13 Arab countries. It shows that poverty as measured by the international poverty line is almost non-existent in 7 of them and ranges between a minimum of almost zero and a maximum of 2.5% of the population in Egypt, which is meaningless at the national level. On the other hand, a wide jump is noted for the least developed Arab countries, where the percentage ranges between 15% and 71% (with a strange result of 6.5% for Mauritania). Although the World Bank’s multidimensional measurement gives higher percentages, the picture does not change radically, as they remain generally low, except for the least developed countries, where they are the highest in Somalia with 84%. The picture also changes radically in Mauritania compared to the income poverty line (6.5% to 46%) and Sudan (15% to 53.5%). This also raises questions if the two measurements relate to the same phenomenon, which is poverty.

Figure 15: Poverty in the Arab Countries - World Bank



Source: Prepared by the author based on respective international reports

Figure 16: Poverty in the Arab Countries - UNDP/Oxford



Source: Prepared by the author based on respective international reports

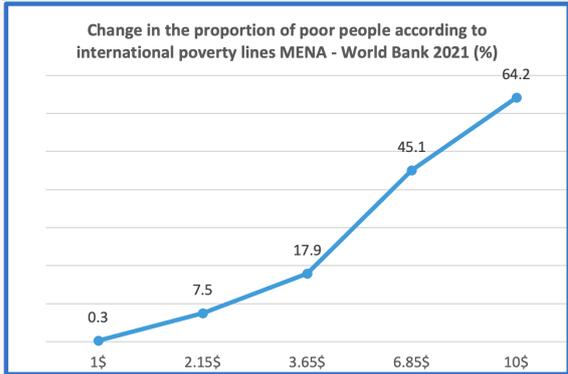
On the other hand, UNDP's MPI measurements (Figure 16) do not deviate from this context, as they also give very low results close to the international poverty line (\$1.9 according to purchasing power parity). They also show the same jump the indicates a wide gap between moderately developed and less developed countries. Figure 16, also shows the poverty rates based on national poverty lines in the countries concerned. They appear much higher than the poverty rate according to the international poverty line and the MPI and cannot be compared to them (For example, in Palestine, the poverty rate according to the international poverty line is 0.8% and 0.6% according to the Oxford Index, compared to 29% according to the national poverty line. However, independent researchers believe that the poverty rate in Palestine is higher than that.) Moreover, the gap between measurements is smaller in less developed countries.

Once again, these results reinforce the view that the definition and measurement of poverty appear to be tailored to least developed countries and are not generalizable to all countries. In any case, the parties to social dialogue in any country cannot rely on international measurements in assessing poverty, nor should they accept the mathematical exercises that governments and international organizations might resort to to raise the poverty rate mathematically so that it appears to ake more sense.

Governments and international organizations often rely on mathematical operations to support their point of view or modify poverty rates using various tools. Firstly, there is extreme and general poverty or the lower and upper poverty lines. Some live below the poverty line (they consider them the poor, exclusively), some are vulnerable to poverty, and some are below the relative poverty line. Finally, some are poor according to the MPI if the total threshold for calculating poverty is 33.33% of the total indicator weights, then other

calculations set the threshold at 50% of the indicators, for example. The above are supposed improvements made mathematically or by modifying the definition and concepts. They aim to avoid going into the real development of measurements and analysis. Moreover, the data is often outdated and does not reflect the current reality (as usual).

Figure 17: Multiple Monetary Poverty Lines MENA - World Bank



Source: Prepared by the author based on the World Bank Database.

Figure 17 shows the following international poverty lines: \$1 is the international poverty line as it was first calculated in 1985, and the dollar in all measurements is according to per capita PPP, \$2.15 is the current international poverty line according to PPP in 2017, \$3.65 per person per day is the international minimum poverty line for countries with a medium level of development, \$6.85 is the upper poverty line for countries with a medium level of development, and \$10 (and there are other measurements greater than \$10) is the international poverty line for developed countries.^[11]

National sides can start from a position of greater self-confidence regarding their knowledge of the reality of the standard of living and poverty. They would also be more capable of assessing the situation through evidence and multiple evaluation methods not limited to mathematical measurements, especially international ones.

POVERTY IN THE SOLID PROJECT COUNTRIES

As previously mentioned, the SOLID project includes 6 countries: Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon. They are relatively diverse geographically, economically, socially, and in terms of the political system. They are all considered to have a medium level of development and growth, including Palestine, which is still under de facto occupation and does not have a fully sovereign and functional state.

MONETARY POVERTY LINE: INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL

We first look at poverty rates based on the international poverty lines contained in the World Bank database (the foremost international reference in studying and following up on poverty issues at the global level and which is strongly influenced by national governments and their policies). The following table displays poverty rates in the six countries referred to according to multiple international poverty lines (monetary poverty line or income poverty line) according to what is available until 2021.

Table 2: Poverty rates according to multiple poverty lines - World Bank

Country	\$1 Per day according to PPP	\$2.15, the extreme international poverty line	\$3.65, the lower poverty line for middle-developed countries	\$6.85, the upper poverty line for middle-developed countries	National Poverty Line
Algeria	0.1	0.5	4.0	36.6	5.5
Jordan	0.0	0.04	4.4	8.2	15.7
Lebanon	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.7	25-30
Morocco	0.0	1.4	9.8	42.1	4.8
Palestine	0.0	0.5	3.1	20.5	29.2
Tunisia	0.0	0.1	2.2	17.9	15.2

Source: World Bank Poverty Database.

(*) National poverty lines are adopted in official documents, accepted by international organizations, and included in their reports. Lebanon is a special case, as there is more than one figure, and estimates range between 25 and %30.

It is evident that the first two poverty lines (\$1 per person per day PPP and the current general international poverty line at \$2.15 per person per day PPP in 2017) are meaningless in these six countries and must be completely neglected. They should be ignored when discussing the state of poverty in the countries concerned in the national dialogue between the various parties. The first reason is that the six countries have a medium level of development/growth, and therefore the international poverty lines that can apply - theoretically - are the third (\$3.65) and the fourth (\$6.85), where the third is the lower (monetary) poverty line for countries with medium development/growth levels, and the fourth is the highest (monetary) poverty line of these countries. In principle, the lower poverty line expresses extreme or abject poverty, while the higher poverty line expresses the state of poverty in general if you will. These are important points from the policy perspective, given that the position of governments and the main current in international organizations often aim to limit the anti-poverty policies within abject or extreme poverty or lower poverty lines, which has serious consequences in terms of impact and scope of coverage.

The following issues appear if we consider these two lines (third and fourth):

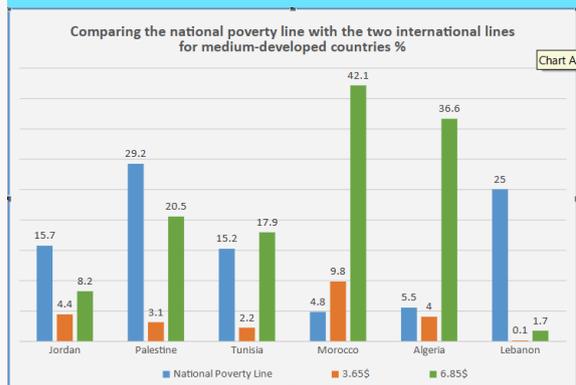
1. There is a wide and irrational gap between poverty rates according to the lower line and the higher line (note, for example, from %4 to %37 in Algeria, and from %10 to %42 in Morocco). The result is absolutely illogical due to the very narrow definition of the minimum poverty line, often resferred to as the food poverty line;

2. There are some differences in measurements between Lebanon and Jordan, on the one hand, and the other four countries, on the other. In Lebanon and Jordan, the poverty rates according to the higher international poverty line remain low (below %10 in both cases). However, they do not reflect at all the reality described in other international measurements or national ones;

3. The (internationally accepted) national poverty lines indicate that the proportions in both Algeria and Morocco are very low compared to other countries and other international poverty lines. It is because government policy adopts a very conservative definition of poverty and measurement. It defines the poor as the poorest of them all. In Tunisia, the situation is brought about by a relatively similar position and the survey on which the national analogy was based. However, in the case of Lebanon, Jordan, and Palrstine, the national measurement is more realistic than the international one.

4. Generally, the higher international poverty line (\$ 6.85 per person) could be the closest to reality but must be verified according to national data. The same applies to national poverty lines except for the cases mentioned above where there is a political decision to limit poverty to its minimum slide. These (international and national) lines can be a starting point for dialogue.

Figure 18: National poverty lines and World Bank poverty lines for medium developed countries

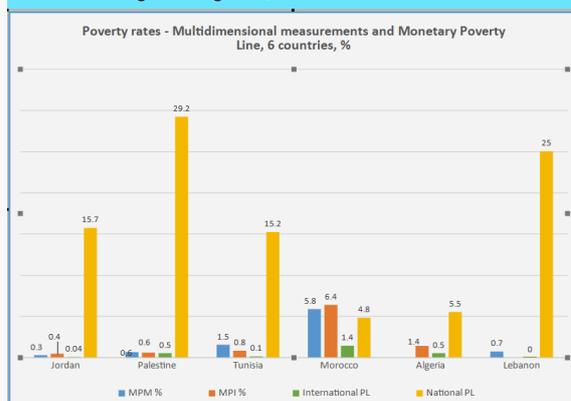


Source: Prepared by the author based on the World Bank Database.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL INTERNATIONAL MEASUREMENTS

Switching from monetary to multidimensional measurement does not automatically solve the problem. In the indicators chosen to build the multidimensional index for measuring poverty, if the thresholds specified for distinguishing between the deprived and the non-deprived are low or inappropriate for the characteristics of society, the multidimensional measurement will give us results close to the internationally accepted minimum international poverty line, which is invalid as previously indicated.

Figure 19: Poverty rates - Multidimensional measurements and Monetary Poverty Line, 6 countries.



Source: Prepared by the author based on the relevant sources.

As indicated in Figure 19, international multidimensional measurements give us very low poverty rates, which are unrealistic in comparison with (internationally accepted) national poverty lines. The only exception is when there is a political position limiting the definition of poverty as narrowly as possible (Morocco, Algeria). In the national dialogue, we should reject and be wary of using the variations in measurements to justify the difference in results. Therefore, it is highly possible that governments and their international and local advisors would say there is a difference in measurement methodologies (and definition) that inevitably results in a difference in results. This is not true, as the difference in the poverty rate between %1 and %15, for example, cannot be explained solely by different methodologies unless we are studying two different phenomena. This logic goes as far as distinguishing between two types of poverty: income poverty and multidimensional poverty. This is a wrong understanding of the development taking place in measurement, as poverty has always been a multidimensional phenomenon, and this has not happened recently. What has changed is the measurement tool, which was one-dimensional (consumption measured in money) and has become multi-dimensional. As previously mentioned, "multidimensional" is a new characteristic of measurement, not a new characteristic of poverty, and the dialogue must be prevented from deviating in this direction.

NECESSARY NATIONAL EFFORT

The necessary collective national effort cannot be dispensed with, and it must form the basis of any national dialogue. Community dialogue is not limited to the issue of measuring poverty. However, it is an essential point because estimating the size of the phenomenon has a decisive role in determining the required policies. The issue of measurement is also the main "point of strength" for governments and international

institutions in imposing their opinions and directions on other parties. They flood the discussion with numbers and complex mathematical data at the expense of content and the reality that the interlocutors know well and which often contradicts the official numbers. Therefore, the focus on this aspect in this paper is to turn this point of strength into a "point of weakness" for representatives of the government, international organizations, and donors if it deviates from truth and objectivity. It could be achieved by refuting the arguments and relying on alternative scientific data and by diversifying the approaches and the nature of the data that is relied upon in estimating the size of the poverty phenomenon, its characteristics, mechanisms of production and renewal, and formulating anti-poverty policies.

It appears that regional or national efforts that imitate or copy global measurements do not achieve the desired goal, as their results also underestimated. One main example is that the Arab Report on Multidimensional Poverty (ESCWA 2017) did not solve the problem of the low poverty measurement results in Arab countries. Rather, the basic Arab guide gave lower results than the basic international guide, which prompted the design of a second Arab guide that gave much higher results than the first guideline by setting very high thresholds for education, for example, and other elements, leading to subsequent distortions in policies. In any case, the report created ways out for governments and the League of Arab States to adopt the low Arab standard and policy directions that exaggerated some aspects at the expense of others. Consequently, regional and national efforts must get out of the "box" imposed by international organizations and their methodologies. They must expand their knowledge, scientific, and factual base so as not to lose sight of their original function of objectively and realistic assessment of poverty in Arab countries as a whole and individually.

NATIONAL EFFORT: EXAMPLES OF THE CONTENTS OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Detailed and up-to-date numerical data may not always be available for all countries. Even international institutions specialized in measuring poverty do not have sufficient databases that can be relied upon without careful consideration and criticism. As in the data above, what is the meaning of poverty rates in Lebanon before 2019 compared to after 2019? What does it mean in Tunisia, Egypt, or any country where developments are accelerating and dangerous crises are occurring, whether they take the form of wars and conflicts, political and institutional crises, debt crises, financial and economic crises, or a combination of all of them. Literature on poverty often includes explicit comments about the situation before and after COVID and, more recently, before and after the Russian-Ukrainian war and other undoubtedly important issues.

However, they ignore the structural problem related to data in "normal" circumstances and the growth of poverty in isolation from "emergencies" that institutions are unable to keep up with or deliberately ignore, as governments often do.

Therefore, it is necessary to start the social dialogue from the current real situation and return to its context and causes. The parties participating in the social dialogue are not preparing a statistical report, so that the research stops at the date of the last survey carried out by the state, which may date back several years, which are separated from qualitative developments with regard to poverty, inequality, and so on. Social dialogue is concerned with starting from the present and reality and investigating the causes and internal and external factors that contribute to past and future developments. In the course of this process, national parties will find sources of data and studies other than those relied upon by governments and international institutions, which are usually limited to their own production. These other

sources - which may be international or sometimes regional - may carry a different opinion that may be more or less objective than the common one. These sources certainly include university theses, books, and research issued by individuals and independent research centers, in addition to sources from unions, civil society, journalism, novels, and other forms of protest, expression, and knowledge. Assessing poverty also requires an expansion of the scope of analysis and a diversity of approaches and evidence that allow its evaluation and determining the optimal policies to combat and eliminate it.

Before moving on to present more detailed elements of the Lebanese example, some of these alternatives for the countries covered by the SOLID Project are distinct from what was previously presented from international, regional, or national sources that have an official or semi-official nature. In Jordan, for example, a study on deprivation (poverty in its broad sense) using the "Quality of Life Index," which is a multidimensional index for measuring deprivation/poverty that was applied to two national surveys in 2010-2002. The report estimated the rate of deprivation in 2010 at %26, a percentage higher than all previous measurements (not to forget that 2010 preceded the Syrian crisis and subsequent developments that had a negative impact on the standard of living and inevitably led to an increase in poverty). This study was issued by the Department of General Statistics in Jordan and other international organizations.^[12] However, using it or using others is ultimately a political decision, as is always the case in the study of poverty (and other issues).

In Morocco, for example, the national measurement using the Oxford methodology gives low results due to the country's commitment to a narrow definition of poverty and strict adherence to the international methodology instead of adapting it as necessary according to

national characteristics. In this case, there is a consensus or match between the international methodology for measuring poverty and government choices. The result was that the poverty rate in 2014 was estimated by the High Planning Commission as follows: %7 multidimensional poverty rate; %5 for monetary poverty. The total proportion of poor people in both "types" of poverty is %12. According to this approach, there are two types of poverty, and what the Moroccan report calls the hard core of poverty (that is, where income poverty meets multidimensional poverty) is limited to only %1.4 of the population.^[13]

However, another Moroccan national report, the 2017 National Human Development Report,^[14] included a comparison of these results with the "measurement of subjective poverty," based on asking the individual respondents questions to classify themselves among the poor or other categories or questions about whether their income is sufficient for their livelihoods. The report stated that %42 of the population in 2014 classified themselves as poor (which is a self-classification). Indeed, the percentage of those who classified themselves as such increased from %39 in 2007 to %42 in 2014, while other poverty measurements recorded a decrease from %9 to %5 for monetary poverty and from %10 to %6 for multidimensional poverty.

However, according to this paper's approach, the most objective results are those given by subjective measurement, which means that the thresholds and methodologies for objective measurement are very low due to a political decision. Of course, a decision can be taken to accept or neglect this or that measurement during the national dialogue or to observe the two measurements and research the reasons for this disparity and the difference in direction between the decreases and increases. On the other hand, in Palestine, a methodology was designed that combines that of the UNDP in terms of measurement techniques

and the human rights perspective in approaching and setting indicators and thresholds. They calculated the national poverty rate at 29%.^[15]

AN EXAMPLE OF A POSSIBLE SOCIAL DIALOGUE ON POVERTY: THE CASE OF LEBANON

In a possible dialogue on poverty and the fight against it in Lebanon, the government's strategy and advisors are expected to focus on the following elements:

- Relative isolation of the state of poverty from the deep and comprehensive crisis afflicting Lebanon and viewing the crisis as a somewhat contingent or external factor in addressing the phenomenon of poverty and its expansion;
- Focusing on numbers and statistics and trying to limit poverty to the so-called "poorest households," which should be the sole focus of anti-poverty policies or with priority over others, especially in light of the crisis where it is not possible to address all problems at once;
- Separating comprehensive anti-crisis policies from macroeconomic and social policies and using the crisis again as a pretext in an attempt to limit interventions to what falls under the title of social assistance (including for employees and other categories if necessary to absorb anger and strong protest against the crisis and its impacts), aid programs, and food and cash transfers through social safety nets for the poorest households;
- These parties shall use all the arguments, pretexts, and studies produced by international organizations, especially the World Bank, asking it to intervene in the dialogue whenever necessary to confirm that there are no alternatives to the government/World Bank proposals, especially with regard to social safety nets adopted by governments based on World Bank loans;

- The government shall seek to portray itself as a victim, attributing the crisis to previous governments or factors beyond its ability and that, as a victim of this situation, it is making every effort to help people and find workable solutions according to priorities.

There are certainly other elements that are used as needed, such as smuggling, the disruption of state institutions, the collapse of services, and the inability to collect taxes and treasury revenues, including the possibility of assigning a basic aspect of responsibility to Syrian refugees (a popular excuse in the second quarter of 2023). However, the previous ideas represent what may be considered the likely fixed elements in any Lebanese government discourse. The parties representing unions, civil society, the poor, popular groups must formulate a counter-discourse to these elements:

A. Realistic description of the state of poverty in light of the crisis: With the ongoing financial, economic, and institutional collapse in Lebanon and the Lebanese Pound losing about %95 of its value, the approach to poverty must be changed radically. The whole idea of the poverty line, the poorest households, and other terms and concepts that make poverty a phenomenon specific to a specific group of the population have become meaningless. The true and scientific description of the Lebanese situation is that the Lebanese people are exposed to a comprehensive and brutal process of impoverishment and the serious and generalized deterioration in the living standards of the overwhelming majority of households and citizens after 2019. It is necessary not to accept any other traditional description of the phenomenon of poverty according to the traditional perception. It must be emphasized that the situation is that of a comprehensive social collapse for the vast majority of households and individuals, requiring policies commensurate with the situation.

B. For logical and analytical considerations, it is necessary to establish the previous characterization in principle as a matter taken for granted by the parties. It must then be directly supported by data and evidence as proof. Statistical data could be used, provided that they are carefully selected, including data and studies that have an official nature and are issued by official bodies. for example:

- Official studies issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS), and international organizations from 1998 until today confirm that poverty/deprivation rates (according to the living conditions index and income poverty lines) ranged between %25 and %35 of the population throughout the period between 1995 and 2019 on the eve of the crisis. These officially adopted numbers constitute a fixed starting point for estimating the poverty rate during the two decades that preceded the crisis.^[16]

- As the only official body authorized to produce statistics, CAS carried out a large-scale study (about 40 thousand households) over the course of a year in 2019/2018. The study showed that the proportion of households whose income was less than 650 thousand Pounds (equivalent to 430 US dollars; the minimum wage at the time was 675 thousand Pounds) in 2019 (before the crisis) reached %18 of the total. It also showed that %43 of households had a total monthly income of less than 1.2 million Pounds (about 800 dollars). CAS also designed a multi-dimensional national index to measure poverty, which it applied to the 2019 survey data. It showed that the proportion of poor/deprived households reached %53 of the population, with important differences between regions, reaching %70 and more in the most deprived regions.^[17]

- CAS carried out a subsequent survey in early 2022 to monitor the impact of the crisis. It found that the proportion of

households whose income is less than 430 dollars per month (650 thousand liras based on the price of 1,500 liras to the dollar in 2019) increased from %18 to about %85 of households (In early 2022, the dollar exchange rate amounted to 25,000 liras, and, at the date of writing these lines, it is approximately 100 thousand liras). In other words, about %85 of households need of some form of support and assistance to provide means of living close to what they were before the crisis. The current situation is that of impoverishment and a comprehensive deterioration in the standard of living. Thus, the traditional poverty approach is completely invalid.

- These figures can be reinforced with other data. For example, the rate of informal (unprotected) work was %55 before the crisis, rising to %62 at the beginning of 2022. Furthermore, according to the narrow definition, the unemployment rate rose from %11 to %30; according to the flexible definition, it rose from %16 to %50. On the other hand, in 2022, youth unemployment reached %68 according to the flexible definition. Moreover, the proportion of the population covered by various types of public and private health/social insurance decreased from about %55 to %49, including what international organizations provide to refugee households. Finally, reliance on remittances from migrant family members increased by %50, reliance on government aid doubled, and the rate of reliance on assistance from NGOs tripled.^[18]

C. The previous data would help support and strengthen an alternative to the government's approach to the phenomenon of poverty. It poses fundamental question about the suitability and feasibility of governmental and international measures. In this regard, the government's approach to dealing with the phenomenon of poverty is characterized by the following:

- It is almost limited to expanding the program for the poorest families (existing

since 2009) and converting it from indirect aid to direct cash transfers. When completed, this system would include 150,000 households. Adding 50,000 households that benefit from similar transfers from the World Food Programme (WFP), the total number of beneficiary households would reach a maximum of 200,000, or close to the %18 of households whose income does not exceed the minimum wage in 2019. It was initially designed on this basis. As indicated previously, the proportion of households with an equivalent income in dollars in 2022 reached %85, meaning that the aid system includes approximately a quarter of those who need it.

- Other measures taken by the government, especially with regard to public sector employees, were to give additional salaries (two salaries, then four, then seven) on top of the original salaries in Lebanese Pounds as assistance (it was called a "productivity allowance"[?]). However, it did not take serious measures to curb the collapse of the exchange rate and the rise in consumer prices, especially food. Such fragmentation and division of interventions eliminate the effectiveness of any isolated procedure.

D. Dialogue participants could emphasize that there are always alternative solutions. In times of crises and when collapse affects the general population, increasing the need to adopt comprehensive social protection systems based on a rights perspective. The human rights approach is not a luxury. International covenants - especially the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESCR)- include a clear definition of the direction in which solutions should go. Moreover, in the Lebanese case, the government falsely claims that it did not have any alternative proposals to the World Bank loan to finance the safety net. Independent experts presented several alternative proposals, and the ILO and UNICEF presented an integrated alternative proposal for a social protection floor and its

potential cost. However, the government chose to ignore it and limit the options within the safety net based on targeting, despite the consensus on its futility, especially in circumstances such as the crisis in Lebanon.

E. Based on the above, union and civil society participants in dialogue and their consultants could stress an alternative approach with three axes:

- The need for a government action plan that addresses the various dimensions of the crisis in an integrated manner. It is the only realistic proposal, given the failure of government interventions between the outbreak of the crisis in the fall of 2019 and today (summer 2023). Indeed, these partial and biased interventions had a disastrous impact and exacerbated the crisis;
- The need for a decisive transition from the targeting approach and the social assistance system to an integrated system of social protection as an immediate, realistic and achievable measure. The system should be based on the rights-based approach and universal coverage and include the necessary complementary measures;
- Public institutions must be reformed and activated, providing essential social services (health and education) and public utilities (water, electricity, public transportation) through government policies and the public sector.

The situation in Lebanon described above is an example of the content of social dialogue and alternative approaches and how to utilize scientific data and actual observations in formulating an alternative discourse, approach, and policies to those proposed by governments, international organizations, and mainstream ideologues. There are many scientific and realistic arguments to criticize that discourse and approach.

V. POVERTY AND INEQUALITY ERADICATION POLICIES IN ARAB COUNTRIES

THE GENERAL INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

The above presented a possible social dialogue model in Lebanon. It illustrates the type of internationally supported government policies adopted by Lebanon, which have many elements in common with Arab regional policies and national policies in other countries. The most important common elements in these policies are the following:

- Firstly, there is a state of acceptance that amounts to governments surrendering to the formulas of the World Bank and the IMF in macroeconomic and financial policies and anti-poverty programs. On the other hand, UN organizations either adopt the same approaches or are extremely shy and cautious in opposing them or proposing alternatives.
- Secondly, national social dialogue is either completely absent or confined to formal consultation in which the government and private sector representation prevails over the representation of independent civil society. Union and civil representation is also appropriated through the involvement of government-linked unions and organizations and the exclusion of independent ones.
- Thirdly, the economic and financial policies recommended by neoliberal globalization institutions are adopted similarly. However, they all tend towards restricting government intervention (especially developmental ones) in favor of international and local market forces and follow "austerity" policies that lead to negative social effects and increasing inequality and poverty.

- Fourthly, the World Bank (and other institutions) succeeded in limiting anti-poverty policies to cash transfer programs and spreading this formula in almost all Arab countries as an effective and realistic formula for reducing poverty.

There are also similarities in national policies directly related to the topic. They differ according to the characteristics of the political system and the economic and social conditions in each country, without excluding the commonalities. The following Table 3 presents seven common policies or interventions and a general idea of their impact on inequality and poverty.

Table 3: Common policies and interventions to combat poverty and inequality from the perspective of governments and international institutions, and their impact

Policy or Intervention	Expected impact on inequality and poverty
1- Encouraging Foreign Investment	Prioritizing the profitability of foreign investments over national goals, especially: failure to respect decent work requirements, failure to respect environmental conditions, and failure to control and monitor profit transfers abroad. In practice, foreign investments may not go to sectors that are productive and useful for development, but rather to sectors that achieve quick profits. The profits transferred abroad exceed any other benefit achieved for the country concerned. It is affected by political relations, stability and security. As a result, it strengthens the mechanisms of wealth concentration and inequality and increases poverty.
2- Borrowing	Loans are another mechanism for appropriation and absorption of national resources. The resources allocated to debt service can outweigh all other areas of expenditure. More than one country is currently facing a heavy debt burden, and a new debt crisis is looming in the region (Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Bahrain) while the Palestinian Authority is in a state of almost complete submission to the Israeli authorities and foreign aid to carry out its most basic duties. Loans are an additional impoverishment mechanism because they divert national resources into debt service instead of being allocated to development and combating poverty.
3- Expanding the tax base	Adopting a progressive and fair tax system is one of the most essential elements in combating inequality. However, the adopted policies prioritize value added tax (VAT) and other indirect taxes. All countries concerned with this study focus on indirect taxes and avoid progressive taxes on the upper income brackets and on wealth. The levels of tax evasion by high-net-worth individuals are also very high. These taxes are regressive and increase inequality and the tax burden on the poor..
4- Privatization and partnership with the private sector	Partnership with the private sector is turning into a kind of economic doctrine. There are no conditions in this partnership regarding requiring the private sector to respect the Guiding Principles for Human Rights in Business. Projects implemented within the framework of these partnerships are often more expensive than they should be. As for privatization in its direct sense, it may also be at the expense of the state's assets, which are people's assets, and may lead to an increase in the prices of services. It is also turning into a quasi-religious belief. There is an expansion of privatization in basic social sectors such as health and education (in addition to water and electricity), where it is promoted as a solution to the problem of deteriorating quality of services. However, there is no proof of the validity of that claim, as it has established a dualism between services for the poor and others for the rich (in education and health in particular), which results in the expansion of severe inequality into these two areas and the deterioration of services directed to the poor and the general citizenry.
5- Reducing the public sector and the budget deficit	While it is done in the name of efficiency and rationalizing spending, in reality, it means responding to a previous distortion represented by the artificial inflation of the government apparatus with an equally artificial reduction of this sector. It takes place at the expense of laying off employees, reducing their allocations and compensation, and the state abandoning basic functions and transferring them to the private sector. Reducing the budget deficit - which is one of the fixed conditions of the International Monetary Fund - is achieved primarily at the expense of the social sectors. The result is also an increase in poverty, total or partial unemployment, and a shift to informal employment and the informal economy.
6- Limiting the fight against poverty to cash transfers	The prescription here is promoted in almost all countries. It is founded on the principle of dispensing with transformational policies in favor of fragmented interventions that take the form of specific programs based on targeting. The common idea here is to remove subsidies on goods (this is a matter of debate) and transfer the alleged savings to cash transfer programs (social safety nets under different names) designated for the poorest groups. These programs have not proven effective in combating poverty, and they suffer from very large structural gaps in terms of their management. The idea of targeting itself is questionable, especially when poverty rates are high (which is also the case, as we showed in previous paragraphs), and it only includes a limited portion of the eligible. The alternative to this approach is to abandon the idea of combating poverty through interventions designated exclusively for the poor, and replace it with general policies that address the causes. As for social protection, the alternative is to adopt rights-based, universal social protection systems and complementary programs for the poor according to need. However, there is no alternative to public policies (basic education, health care, public transportation, and other services ranging from free to costs affordable to poor families).
7- Restriction of freedoms and absence of social dialogue	There is a general tendency to restrict press and public freedoms in Arab countries, especially for unions and civil society organizations under similar pretexts (stability, combating terrorism, COVID, relations with foreign parties). There are also no institutionalized and effective mechanisms for social dialogue in the countries concerned with the project (and others). In most cases, it requires popular pressure in various forms and in the street in order to extract any simple demand. In practical terms, restricting freedoms and absenting or weakening social dialogue weakens the poor, popular groups, and citizens in general, disrupting their ability to influence the course of policies through dialogue. It leads to weakening the forces working to achieve social justice, equality, and poverty eradication in favor of continuing injustice, disparity, and deprivation.

Source: Prepared by the author.

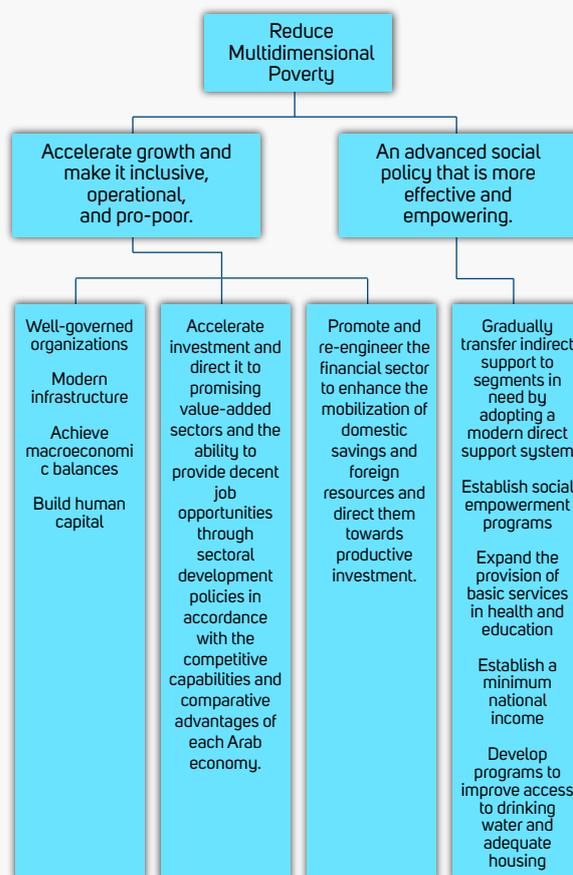
A LOOK AT THE ARAB POVERTY ERADICATION STRATEGY

In 2019, the relevant departments of the League of Arab States issued the Arab Strategic Framework for the Elimination of Multidimensional Poverty 2030-2020. The framework carried the logos of the League of Arab States, the Arab Planning Institute, seven UN committees and regional offices, and the Arab Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization.^[19]

The analytical framework and information contained in the document are based primarily on the Arab report on multidimensional poverty that was issued by ESCWA and the League of Arab States in 2017 (it was noted in previous paragraphs that there are fundamental observations on its methodology and results). The following paragraphs focus on commenting on its policy recommendations.

In its second section, the Strategic Framework presents what it calls the development model to combat multidimensional poverty. It is summarized in Figure 20 below and appears to be composed of two dimensions. The first is economic, related to accelerating growth and making it operational and pro-poor. The second is social, through adopting an effective social policy. The details show the dominance of the economic approach over the first dimension, which does not deviate from the mainstream ideas governed by the neoliberal economic approach. It focuses on good governance,^[20] accelerating investment, benefiting from competitive advantages, and advancing the financial sector. Similarly, the social dimension also stems from IMF and World Bank prescription, i.e. an end to subsidies and replacing it with cash transfers targeting the poor and general talk about health, education, and services. Nothing actually affects the adoption of actual policies that lead to eliminating poverty and curbing this model's impoverishment mechanisms,

which does not even resemble the development models adopted by the UN, such as the 2030 Agenda, which fundamentally goes beyond what is presented here.



Source: Arab Strategic Framework to Combat Poverty

On the other hand, translating the above-mentioned development model into policies, interventions, and programs is detailed in the Strategic Framework's third section. It sheds additional light on the proposal's true content, while remaining within the framework of generalities when it comes to policies. However, it is more specific when it comes to particular programs. The whole issue stems from prioritizing vertical programs and interventions at the expense of the integrative and comprehensive approach to policies that needs to be adopted. Specific programs, projects, and interventions are always preferable to policies or strategic directions, which must be formulated clearly to avoid creating fundamental confusion in their direction.

Table 4 below summarizes all the policies and programs proposed by the Arab Strategic Framework to eliminate "multidimensional poverty." It is divided into five sections. The first and second columns summarize these proposals exactly as they appear in the strategic framework (while leaving out what is very general). The third column includes key remarks on these proposals.

Table 4: Policy and Program Proposals in the Arab Strategic Framework, with comments.		
Policies and Programs	Main Interventions	Comments
1- Stimulate employment-intensive and pro-poor growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the banking sector • Direct investment towards employment-intensive sectors • Achieve macroeconomic balance: control the budget deficit and limit public debt • Well-governed institutionsAs a result, it strengthens the mechanisms of wealth concentration and inequality and increases poverty. 	It is natural and proper for policies to begin with macroeconomic matters. However, the first proposed intervention is to develop the banking sector and has nothing to do with combating poverty. The other points also contain general ideas (employment-intensive sectors), but are immediately followed by a call for austerity by reducing the budget deficit, as well as dealing with debt within the ceilings of creditors and international organizations.
2- Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional talk about education, curricula, quality, etc. • Encouraging the participation of the private sector and civil society, and relying on them in high-quality education programs in places where the poor live. 	The text on education is traditional and general. It completely ignores the critical role of the state and the public sector in preserving education as a "public good" (public utility). It is the responsibility of public authorities and they need to provide it with the required quality to all through public policies. However, the Arab Framework suggests the private sector's involvement (in effect, the privatization of education, as we see it in practice). However, the involvement of civil society organizations is only formal. Moreover, the intervention also a targeting approach to education through special programs for poor residential areas with the private sector's participation, instead of comprehensive public policies.
3- Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional discourse. • Universal Health Coverage. • Other points like governance, reproductive health, and food. 	The text is also general, and clearly shows the contribution of UN agencies concerned with health. A basic idea directly related to poverty is universal health insurance, although there are no specific guidelines in this regard.
4- Improving the standard of living of the poor	<p>A. Effective social development policies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop targeting mechanisms according to Proxy Mean Tests (PMT). 2. Information infrastructure. 3. Innovative and sustainable financing. 	Here is a purely technical approach (information infrastructure and financing mechanisms), but what is more important is the explicit adoption of the World Bank's approach - cash transfers and safety nets based on targeting. The framework also adopts a specific mechanism to identify beneficiaries (PMT - Proxy Mean Test). It is an ineffective approach in combating poverty and limited to social assistance. However, it is in the interest of the poor and the general citizenry to move to a human-rights-based universal social protection system, as discussed in the previous paragraphs.
	<p>B. Housing and public facilities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Traditional discourse. 2. Eliminating slums. 3. A reference to women being empowered to use lands. 	The discourse is general and traditional. Moreover, the expression "eliminating" slums is questionable. It could provide prior justifications for what we are witnessing of the forced transfer of residents in poor neighborhoods to other areas against their will and without providing the necessary conditions.
5- Role of the UN and League of Arab States	Traditional discourse and focus on monitoring, follow-up, research centers, and technical support.	No need to mention that the text here is not new and does not anything to the requirements for eradicating poverty.

Source: Prepared by author based on the Strategic Arab Framework.

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS OF POLICY AND PROGRAM PROPOSALS

The point that must be noted first is this repeated insistence throughout the strategic framework on stressing that it is about eliminating "multidimensional poverty." As mentioned above, in recent years, the authors of some studies encountered some confusion and could not not distinguish between multidimensional evidence for measuring poverty and multidimensional poverty as something different from income poverty. Intentionally or unintentionally, the strategic framework embraces this ambiguous understanding, which has policy implications and can be used as a counter-argument in any potential social dialogue. Thus, when faced with any embarrassment related to assessing the extent of poverty or the absence of any structural treatments related to economic options and the external (globalized) dimension of the poverty and impoverishment, governments and their advisors can use the excuse that it is a question of income or monetary poverty, and that the dialogue is currently dealing with multidimensional poverty, which stems from a social, not economic, perspective. Therefore, they clearly circumvent the need to address the structural factors related to poverty, especially economic ones, limiting the fight against poverty to the aspects called social in the traditional sense, which are often confined to the perspective of "social sectors" (health, education, housing, public services, poverty as a state of deprivation specific to particular groups). They push towards the adoption of anti-poverty policies separate from overall policies, and assuming the possibility of reducing or eliminating the phenomenon of poverty through policies specific to poor groups alone, without addressing any structural change in the economies that generate poverty. It is a deficient approach, as many studies have shown, including those issued by UN agencies.^[21]

The second general point is the absence of any discussion of the causes of poverty and proposal of policies or interventions to address them. Furthermore, what is reported about growth that creates decent work opportunities and is pro-poor cannot be explained. The available proposals relate to developing the banking sector [!] and imposing a ceiling on the budget deficit and debts [!]. Moreover, there is no reference, for example, to the responsibility of debt in generating poverty and putting pressure on the priorities of local resource use, smuggling profits abroad, or adopting an explicitly and directly progressive tax system on wealth and high incomes. Quite the opposite, the policies followed by the governments and the League of Arab States and what they represent almost completely adopt (with marginal differences) the international neoliberal austerity recipe that goes in the opposite direction to combating poverty and inequality and increases them (as what has actually been happening for years and decades). In this sense, talking about economic growth that generates decent work opportunities is meaningless.

For decades, the Arab countries made up the region with the highest unemployment rates in the world, especially youth unemployment. It is a region in which the proportion of informal labor ranges from more than half of the labor force (in Lebanon, where the rate is relatively low compared to other Arab countries, informal labor represented %55 of the total labor force in 2019 before the crisis) and may reach more than %70 in some other Arab countries. On the other hand, in more than one Arab country, official reforms in social protection under the World Bank directions were accompanied with an increase in household spending on health and education (Palestine, Morocco, etc.).^[22] Instead of providing high-quality education through the government sector and its institutions, there is an expansion of the private sector in education on a commercial and profit-based basis. The same applies to the health sector.

In short, most of the adopted policies generate poverty and inequality and must be radically altered. This means that the partial, isolated, and technical proposals presented here and there related to combating poverty, especially through social assistance measures, remain useless in the medium and long terms. They have a limited and localized impact in alleviating poverty and nothing more for the direct beneficiaries while keeping them in a state of poverty and deprivation instead of final exit from them.

Finally, it must be remembered while things are such a failure in combating poverty, policies and interventions to combat inequality are almost completely absent, as they are more closely related to structural factors and the economic and political dynamics existing in society.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO THE ARAB STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK PROPOSALS?

It is not useful to risk proposing unified prescriptions in the manner of institutions criticized in this paper. However, policy alternatives must be formulated through a true social dialogue on the national level in which all parties - specifically unions, representatives of civil society, poor and marginalized groups, and independent researchers - have equal opportunities to express opinions and influence the final decision.

Nonetheless, this paper concludes by presenting perceptions that contradict the Arab Strategic Framework and are ahead of it in terms of vision and actual commitment to combating poverty and inequality. They are also issued by UN institutions (so as not to say that they are private perceptions). The following two examples can inform prospective social dialogue parties with ideas and scientific, factual, and analytical evidence to strengthen their position in the dialogue.

FIRST: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN RELATION TO COMBATING POVERTY

The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, presented a very important report in 2020 on "The parlous state of poverty eradication," including a harsh criticism of the World Bank and UN organizations that still rely on the "miserable" international poverty line to claim progress in eradicating poverty. It also discusses how to eliminate this phenomenon. The report includes recommendations for policy directions that are completely opposite to the prevailing trends in the current neoliberal globalization adopted by Arab governments. The report went so far as to call for a review of the 2030 Agenda itself, especially after the COVID pandemic, due to its inefficiency in eliminating poverty.

The report starts by summarizing the main general recommendations and ends by detailing the steps required to eradicate poverty. It says:

"Poverty is a political choice and its elimination requires:

- a) reconceiving the relationship between growth and poverty eradication (rejecting the idea that strengthening markets automatically leads to poverty eradication and explicit criticism of IMF policies);
- b) Tackling inequality and embracing redistribution;
- c) Going beyond the discussion of aid and promoting tax justice (the need for comprehensive tax reform, criticism of the transfer of profits by international companies to tax havens, which amounted to %40 of their profits in 2015, and criticism of reducing corporate taxes);

d) Implementing universal social protection for all (the report considers it a human right);

e) Emphasizing the centrality of the role of the government (the state) (criticism of privatization and the attempt to replace state responsibility with unsupervised and unaccountable charitable work);

f) Embracing participatory [democratic] governance;

g) Adapting international poverty measurement.”

SECOND: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN RELATION TO REDUCING INEQUALITY

The second example is about how to confront inequality. It is taken from a book by Anthony Atkinson, *Inequality: What Can Be Done?*^[23] In the course of his book, the author offers 15 suggestions for what can be done in order to reduce inequality and move towards a more just society. These suggestions are the following:

Box 2: Anthony Atkinson's Inequality Reduction Proposals

1. Direct innovation and technological change towards increasing employability.

2. Public policy should aim at a proper balance of power among stakeholders.

3. Combating unemployment: The government should commit to providing work opportunities.

4. Laws and practices for minimum wages and above based on national dialogue.

5. Paying realistic interest on savings, with a cap on deposits.

6. Payment of capital to all persons upon reaching the age of majority.

7. Establishing a national investment department affiliated with the government that owns shares in companies and assets.

8. Adopting a progressive tax on net individual income of up to %65 and expanding the tax base.

9. Tax deductions for the lower brackets of individual income.

10. Imposing progressive taxes on inheritance and gifts after death.

11. A proportional or progressive tax on real estate based on recent value assessments.

12. Providing an adequate basic income for each child and counting it as part of taxable income.

13. Adoption of a participation income (at the national level) to supplement social protection systems currently based on a generalized basic income for each child in the EU.

14. Or (instead of 13) developing social insurance systems, increasing their provision, and expanding their coverage.

15. Rich countries should raise their contribution to official development aid to %1 of their national income.

Source: Atkinson, Inequality: What Can Be Done?

Although the above recommendations are presented on a global scale, they are distinguished by two basic issues compared to what was stated in the Arab Strategic Framework for Combating Poverty and the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment in its old and new forms promoted by the IMF (and others), which governments often surrender to.

- The first issue is the advanced degree of integration in the proposals. They include economic, social, and political measures and have a structural and procedural nature simultaneously. These are proposals that link the fight against inequality and the fight against poverty as two inseparable aspects of one process;
- The second issue is that they present very bold and specific proposals that leave no room for believing that they can be circumvented and emptied of their content through poetic rhetoric and circumvention of the facts.

For example, instead of the tired talk about taxes, there is a specific proposal of a progressive tax up to %65 on the highest upper segments of income and wealth and high taxes on inheritance, gifts after death, and real estate. This definitely goes in the opposite direction to current policies, whether in terms of focusing on the VAT and similar indirect and consumption taxes, being limited to modest progressive taxes, or moving towards reducing taxes on companies to encourage investment. With regard to social protection and providing the necessary material requirements to liberate people from poverty, the proposals explicitly mention a general basic income for all, including children, expanding the social protection system to the point of including everyone or granting every young person who has reached the age of majority capital to help them start future independent economic activities or other purposes. They do not ignore a clear definition of the state's responsibility to guarantee job opportunities

for those interested and other suggestions at the international level.

Such suggestions can be valid at the national level after adapting them to the characteristics of the country in question unless they are emptied of their content. They can also constitute a source of inspiration for participants in social dialogue and are clearly more convincing and tangible than the policies and programs proposed by Arab governments and their advisors of the type presented above. In this sense, adopting similar policies and measures would put the country on the path to reducing inequality and poverty in a certain way, albeit gradually, while some of what is proposed and practiced in Arab countries only leads to deepening inequality and expanding the spread of poverty, not reducing them.

CONCLUSION

This paper does not have a readymade prescription, and prescriptions by the governments and their supporting institutions do not have one that works. When it comes to social dialogue, we must arm ourselves with knowledge, self-confidence, and negotiation skills and use all methods provided by the human rights system, national constitutions, and laws to effectively participate in policymaking. In this regard, it is imperative to possess critical knowledge on the issues of inequality and poverty, which allows representatives of the poor and general citizens to be freed from the influence of the official narrative that governments and their international and local advisors try to impose as a single point on the agenda.

Critical knowledge is different from the false knowledge promoted by the mainstream. It has been proven contrary to reality in the context of development over the previous decades, during the last few years in particular, and currently. The first step to success in dialogue and actual participation in policy-making, or at least influencing them, begins with producing a different scientific narrative biased in favor of the values of social justice, democracy, and human rights.

This paper aimed to provide an alternative scientific base that has a dialectical nature to the prevailing narrative. Concerned parties can benefit from their own cognitive endeavors in their social dialogue and all levels of struggle inside and outside institutions to eradicate poverty, curb inequality, and enforce human rights, in particular economic, social, and cultural rights, as stated in ICESCR.

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