

Arab Regional Futures Forum: Reflections from the Region

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ABOUT

The Regional Futures Forum: Reflections from the Arab Region was held online on 11 May 2026 as part of the 2026 Regional Futures Forum Dialogue Series. The Forum was co-organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) and the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN), bringing together representatives of civil society organizations, regional institutions, United Nations entities, academia, and experts from across the Arab region to exchange perspectives on the implementation of the Pact for the Future, the future of multilateralism, and regional priorities for sustainable development and global governance reform.

Building on the outcomes of the 2026 Regional Civil Society Forum on Sustainable Development, the dialogue explored how the commitments contained in the Pact for the Future can be translated into meaningful action within the Arab region while contributing to broader international processes, including the 2026 Global Futures Forum, the 2027 SDG Summit, the 2028 High-Level Review of the Pact for the Future, and ongoing UN80 discussions.

The Forum provided a platform for participants to:

- Share regional perspectives on the implementation of the Pact for the Future and identify opportunities and challenges within the Arab context.
- Examine the interlinkages between the Pact for the Future, Agenda 2030, UN80, and broader multilateral reform processes.
- Identify priorities and recommendations to strengthen accountability, sustainable development, peace, and inclusive multilateralism.
- Contribute to a people-centred vision for the future of the United Nations and global governance beyond 2030.

This outcome document captures the main reflections, concerns, and recommendations emerging from the dialogue. It aims to inform regional and global discussions and contribute to ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusive, accountable, and effective multilateral cooperation.



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We are particularly grateful to the representatives of civil society organizations, United Nations entities, regional organizations, academia, youth networks, and other stakeholders from across the Arab region whose thoughtful contributions enriched the dialogue and helped shape the reflections and recommendations presented in this publication.

This outcome document reflects a collective exchange of ideas and serves as a regional contribution to ongoing discussions on the implementation of the Pact for the Future, preparations for the 2026 Global Futures Forum, the 2027 SDG Summit, the 2028 High-Level Review of the Pact for the Future, and broader discussions on the future of multilateralism and the United Nations.

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Disclaimer

This is a summary of the discussions, consultations and inputs received as part of the 2026 xx Futures Forum Dialogue Series. The views and opinions expressed represent the discussions held and do not necessarily represent an endorsement by C4UN.



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Introduction

Today, the world is witnessing interconnected and overlapping crises at all levels; economic, social, environmental, political. Moreover there is a growing crisis of confidence in the multilateral system and its ability to respond effectively to people's needs. These realities raise fundamental questions about whether the current international system is capable of addressing the priorities and aspirations of people. Therefore the discussions around the Pact for the Future and broader United Nations reform processes have become increasingly important as efforts to revive multilateralism and strengthen international cooperation on sustainable development, peace and security, digital justice, the rights of future generations, and global governance Reform.

For Arab civil society, particularly, engagement in these processes stems from the recognition that multilateralism remains essential in a world facing crises that transcend national borders, including wars, climate change, pandemics, economic instability, and food insecurity. No country, regardless of its power or resources, can address these challenges alone. Despite its shortcomings, the multilateral system continues to provide the primary framework for international cooperation, the establishment of common standards and rules, the protection of international law, and the defense of collective and individual rights. In the absence of such a framework, global affairs would increasingly be governed solely by power dynamics, further marginalizing developing countries and weakening accountability to international standards and human rights principles.

At the same time, defending multilateralism does not mean overlooking the structural inequalities and limitations embedded within the current international system. The experiences of the Arab region over recent decades have exposed persistent double standards, selective implementation of international norms, weak accountability mechanisms, unequal representation, and disparities in influence and resources within global institutions. As a result, current discussions on the Pact for the Future and UN reform are viewed not simply as institutional debates, but as opportunities to advocate for a more just, inclusive, democratic, and people-centered multilateralism—one that reflects the priorities of peoples rather than existing political and economic power balances.

From the perspective of the Arab region, the Pact reflects an important recognition that the challenges we face — conflicts, inequality, debt, climate vulnerability, shrinking policy space, and social fragmentation — are deeply interconnected. In this context, it becomes necessary to view the Pact for the Future not merely as a declaration of intentions, but as a real test of the possibility of reforming the multilateral system and addressing its structural imbalances. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the Pact and its ability to produce tangible change remain dependent on addressing a number of structural and political challenges that may limit its chances of success.



The Pact for the Future and the Arab region

The Arab region today is not merely facing isolated crises; it is experiencing overlapping structural breakdowns reflected through high levels of public debt, rising poverty and inequality, shrinking policy space, armed conflicts and prolonged occupations, displacement and forced migration, and increasing social, economic, and climate vulnerability. This is particularly evident in worsening food, energy, and water crises, which have become among the most significant structural challenges threatening stability and sustainable development in the coming period. In this context, the Pact for the Future should be assessed not on the basis of its ambitious language, but on its actual capacity to respond to these realities.

This requires linking peace, development, and justice, addressing economic models and not only governance structures, ensuring that recovery and reconstruction processes are rights-based and inclusive, and protecting social cohesion and public accountability while ending impunity. It is also important to reflect on the relationship between the commitments contained within the Pact for the Future and the growing number of new or parallel initiatives.

While such initiatives may appear important, there is a risk that they may fragment priorities and resources and weaken collectively agreed commitments within the United Nations framework, particularly regarding peace, development, and multilateral cooperation. The challenge today is therefore not the creation of additional platforms, but rather strengthening implementation, coherence, and accountability within the multilateral system instead of encouraging further fragmentation and competition among initiatives.

Main accountability gaps or implementation challenges to the Pact

The Pact provides an important framework for revitalizing multilateral action, yet it remains limited in several key areas. First, accountability mechanisms remain weak. Commitments risk remaining within the realm of non-binding declarations, particularly in the absence of measurable indicators and independent monitoring and follow-up mechanisms. Second, structural imbalances are still not sufficiently addressed. There remains limited attention to distortions within the global financial architecture, debt restructuring and cancellation, inequalities in power relations and decision-making, corporate capture, and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities between the Global North and South, including tax evasion and avoidance and illicit financial flows. Third, the role of international financial institutions is still not subject to adequate scrutiny and review. Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank continue to directly shape national policy space, often prioritizing austerity and short-term financial stability at the expense of social



justice and long-term development. Therefore, while the Pact represents a necessary step, it still largely remains within the realm of declarations of intent and has not yet become a truly transformative framework.

The Pact for the Future, Agenda 2030, and UN Reform

The central question is not whether these processes exist, but whether they are coherent and mutually reinforcing. In principle, the Pact for the Future, the Sustainable Development Goals within the UN 2030 Agenda, and the UN80 reform process should reinforce one another. In practice, however, there is a real risk of fragmentation and contradiction. For example the SDGs emphasize inclusion, sustainability, and social justice, while prevailing global economic policies continue to prioritize austerity, debt servicing, and short-term financial stability. This creates a structural contradiction between the discourse of development and economic realities. Accordingly, unless UN reforms address governance imbalances, financing constraints, policy incoherence, and unequal power relations within the international system, they risk becoming merely institutional reforms without real developmental impact. Furthermore it is no longer possible to discuss sustainable development in isolation from broader transformations in the global political economy and geopolitical order.

In this regard, first we continue witnessing rising militarization and militarized budgets with huge military spending particularly in the United States and Europe. Global military expenditure continues to rise dramatically. The United States alone is allocating nearly 1.3 trillion dollars to military and security spending in the 2027 budget — the largest in its history. Global military expenditure reached a record level in 2025, amounting to approximately 2.887 trillion US dollars, marking the eleventh consecutive year of rising military spending worldwide. According to the 2026 report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) global military spending increased by 2.9% in real terms compared to 2024, and military expenditure now represents approximately 2.5% of global GDP, the highest level since 2009. This reflects a profound contradiction; while the international community speaks about financing sustainable development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, far greater resources are being directed toward militarization, arms production, and wars. Thus, the problem is not merely a lack of resources, but also political priorities and the way wealth and power are distributed Globally.

On the other hand, we see that there is heavy focus on domestic resource mobilization, financial reforms, trade reform, debt management, and aid effectiveness. Nevertheless, the sovereignty and resources control of countries are sidelined. Across large parts of the Global South, including the Arab region, resource extraction remains unjust, value chains remain externally controlled, and economic dependency restricts sovereign development choices.



It is important to note that without economic sovereignty and fair access to national resources, sustainable development remains structurally constrained. Furthermore, considering the Financing for Development process and the Seville outcomes and commitments; we continue to face limitations and contradictions over the tools and mechanisms necessary to support development efforts, particularly in developing countries. In addition to these, the increasing focus on domestic resource mobilization, while important, cannot substitute for a fair and equitable international economic and trading system. However, the negotiations within the World Trade Organization remain stalled and are not moving toward meaningful reform of the global trading system, while the debt crisis remains unresolved, and debt restructuring continues to be used as a tool for imposing further conditionalities and restrictive policies instead of creating space for recovery and development. Meanwhile, development aid is declining, while a growing share of funding is being redirected toward humanitarian responses, displacement and migration crises, militarization, and security rather than long-term sustainable development. This reflects a broader structural problem: the global financial and trading system continues to reproduce dependency and inequality instead of supporting transformative development pathways.

Another key issue within the Financing for Development agenda concerns technology transfer and digital transformation. While digital transformation and technological innovation are presented as major drivers of development, significant gaps persist in access to technology, digital infrastructure, data governance, and technological capabilities. However, developing countries continue to face limited access to advanced technologies, restrictive intellectual property regimes, unequal control over digital platforms and data, and widening digital divides. Without fair technology transfer, genuine digital cooperation, and investments in local capacity-building, digital transformation risks reproducing inequalities instead of reducing them. Therefore, the digital agenda should be understood not merely as a technological issue, but also as a matter related to development, justice, sovereignty, and equitable participation in the global economy.

The Pact for the Future, Agenda 2030, and UN Reform

We are witnessing the emergence of new geopolitical alliances and blocs reshaping the multilateral system. These transformations reflect growing dissatisfaction with the current international order, demands for more balanced representation, particularly regarding veto power within the United Nations and quotas within international financial institutions, and attempts to establish alternative political and economic frameworks. These new alliances deeply affect the multilateral system because they reflect shifts in global power balances and in the nature of international relations themselves.

On one hand, these alliances express declining confidence in the traditional international



order established after the Cold War, as well as growing perceptions among many countries — particularly in the Global South — that existing international institutions are no longer capable of ensuring balance or fairly representing global interests. On the other hand, the rise of new blocs such as BRICS, the growing Chinese role, and the repositioning of regional powers such as the Gulf countries, Turkey, and India contribute to the gradual transition from a unipolar system toward a more complex and multipolar order.

However, these transformations also carry contradictory dimensions. They may open space for a more balanced international order and provide countries of the Global South with greater room for maneuver and alternative partnerships, particularly in financing, trade, energy, and technology. Yet they may also deepen fragmentation and polarization if this emerging multipolarity evolves into competing geopolitical blocs rather than becoming a pathway toward reforming the multilateral system and strengthening international cooperation. These new alliances also affect the effectiveness of traditional international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and international financial institutions. These institutions increasingly struggle to reach global consensus amid conflicting interests and multiple centers of power. This explains the paralysis and stagnation affecting many areas of global governance, from climate and trade to peace and development.

Ultimately, the future of multilateralism will largely depend on whether these new alliances contribute to a more just and inclusive reform of the international system, or whether they reproduce divisions and conflicts within new and increasingly fragile power balances.

The Role of Civil Society: From Participation to Influence

Civil society in the region must move beyond consultation, symbolic participation, and reactive engagement toward genuine influence over development priorities and public policy. This becomes particularly important given that the Pact for the Future itself recognizes the role of civil society and the importance of partnership with it as a key actor in achieving sustainable development, strengthening accountability, and promoting participatory democracy. Accordingly, translating these commitments into reality requires expanding civic space, safeguarding the independence of civil society, and ensuring its meaningful participation in decision-making.

This requires:

- Continuous monitoring of the implementation of these global commitments and tracking commitments at national and regional levels, and assessing whether global frameworks are being translated into real policies.

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- Producing evidence and knowledge through tools and mechanisms such as social protection monitoring, and linking political commitments to tangible social and economic outcomes.
 - Reshaping narratives challenging the notion that economic policies are merely “technical” matters, and highlighting their social, environmental, political, and developmental dimensions.

As such, civil society should not merely participate in dialogue, but also contribute to redefining development itself. This also means the urgent need to integrate the concept of “Beyond GDP” more clearly into discussions surrounding the Pact for the Future. This requires moving beyond narrow economic growth indicators and rethinking development from the perspective of justice, equality, well-being, and human capabilities. This includes shifting from prioritizing growth to prioritizing justice and fairness, moving from measuring income alone toward expanding rights and opportunities, and moving beyond exclusive reliance on economic performance indicators toward approaches that consider social cohesion, environmental sustainability, equality, and human dignity. Without such a transformation in the conceptual model of development, development frameworks will continue reproducing the very inequalities and exclusions they claim to address.

Furthermore, one of the key issues often absent from global discussions is policy space. For many Arab countries, development pathways remain constrained by debt, which has become not only an economic burden but also a political one through conditionalities, externally imposed conditions tied to borrowing or debt restructuring, external political pressures that increasingly extend beyond structural reforms toward political alignments and alliances, unequal trade relations, and dependence on unstable external financing. Without reclaiming policy space, commitments related to sustainable development remain limited, and sovereignty becomes more symbolic than substantive. Genuine sustainable development cannot be achieved when countries are unable to define their own social and economic priorities.

Recommendations

If the Pact for the Future is to become meaningful and capable of producing real transformation,

several fundamental shifts are required:

- Ensure that the Pact for the Future, Agenda 2030, and UN reform processes move beyond institutional coordination and adaptation toward genuine structural transformation that addresses inequality, strengthens multilateralism, and advances sustainable, just, and inclusive development.

- Shift from mere listing commitments to ensuring genuine accountability establishing clear and measurable indicators, ensuring independent monitoring and follow-up mechanisms, and strengthening transparency and accountability.
- Move from Technical Solutions toward Structural Change addressing inequality at both national and global levels, reforming global financial governance, and prioritizing social justice within economic policies.
- Recognize civil society's role, move from participation to partnership in Policymaking ensuring that civil society should be key in designing, implementing, and monitoring policies.
- Invest in people not in militarization, redirecting global resources toward health, education, social protection, climate action and sustainable development.



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