Egypt 2030:
A new decade towards sustainable development
The world is still living through the ongoing emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed fragilities that far exceed the realm of global health. The pandemic has resulted in a deceleration in progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which are now in their sixth year and still represent humanity’s outline for a better future. In January 2020, the United Nations declared the decade from 2020 to 2030 to be the ‘Decade of Action’ in terms of accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the planned action both more difficult and more urgent at the same time. It has also demonstrated the importance of developmental goals and the necessity of working to achieve them, as well as the importance of focusing on the human Right to Development. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and infected millions, has brought economies to a halt, and has distorted every aspect of modern life. However, it is more than just a health crisis; it became an economic, humanitarian, security crisis, as well as a crisis in terms of human rights. Measures taken to address the pandemic therefore require rethinking not only the approach to managing the development process at the national level, but also regionally and internationally. In addition, countries must factor in the COVID-19 pandemic’s implications when considering their plans to achieve sustainable development, as it has consequences for all.

In light of what has been captured in the first part of the Egypt Human Development Report 2021 in terms of major structural reforms in Egypt’s development pathway during the last half of the decade 2011-2020, this second part of the Report discusses prospects of future areas of work to further complete the development pathway within the framework of national priorities identified by the SDS: Egypt Vision 2030. This mandates that Egypt adopt an ambitious plan of action for a new Decade of Action 2021-2030 that will take into consideration the difficult global conditions that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. It relies on innovative programmes that offer smarter solutions to overcome the challenges in various developmental areas and to work on moving forward on the path to achieving sustainable development, based on the principles of equality, inclusion and the capacity to deal with risks in a manner that protects society from any future adverse developments, by incorporating the element of risk hedging as a main component of the development approach and policies. The new decade of achievements sets its sight on Egyptian citizens, and will contribute to boosting current efforts aiming at enhancing the development progress in Egypt to benefit all its citizens without discrimination, leaving no one behind.

Egypt’s path to sustainable development in the next decade will likely benefit from the set of developmental practices established during recent years. It has adopted a coherent approach combining the human rights perspective and planning and implementation processes in an unprecedented way, allowing the identification of urgent issues that concern all Egyptians and weigh on executive action, and has dealt with these issues with an unprecedented coherence and comprehensiveness.

It should be noted that achieving sustainable development during the Decade of Action will require the same strong political backing that has been the primary driver of the developmental and structural reforms that were implemented over the past six years, and which reflects a real desire for reform among all individuals in society.

Consequently, the general framework of Egypt’s work plan for the decade of achievements is based on a set of elements, including: the principles governing the development process in Egypt, derived from the 2014 Constitution (which contained many elements of the Sustainable Development Goals), the goals are to be achieved via an integrated approach that takes into account the linkages and the interdependency between goals which will contribute to saving efforts and resources, and help design successful imple-
The principles governing Egypt’s development prospects

Development strategies cannot succeed, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions without adherence to the principles of equal opportunity and of giving everyone a fair opportunity to enjoy the proceeds of growth. Egypt’s 2014 Constitution laid down a set of key principles that establish this commitment, and Egypt should continue to follow them on its path to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals over the next decade. The Constitution contains various articles reflecting the essence of the Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasize the necessity for the developmental process to ensure equal opportunities for all people in order to realize their capabilities in a framework of dignity and equality, and for all to enjoy a life of prosperity and fulfillment of their aspirations.

The 2014 Constitution includes principles that affirm the Right to Development and establish the right of Egyptians to a decent life in all aspects. It includes the fair distribution of the proceeds of development and a reduction in income and growth disparities, achieving a geographic, sectoral and environmental balance. It also affirmed the importance of maximizing investment in human energy within the framework of human development. Moreover, the Constitution has clearly established the State’s role in providing education and health services and fostering scientific research as a right for all citizens and at a quality consistent with international standards. The Constitution also sets out minimum governmental expenditure for these sectors; these expenditures are supposed to gradually increase in line with international spending levels. Egypt is also one of the countries that has enshrined the right to housing in its Constitution; Article 78 mandates that the State shall ensure citizens’ right to adequate, safe and healthy housing in a manner which preserves human dignity and achieves social justice.

The Constitution pays considerable attention to the issue of gender equality and the enhancement of women’s rights and contains articles that mandate gender equality, non-discrimination, women’s right to be appointed to judicial bodies, the protection of women from all forms of violence, and women’s participation in political life. It stresses the State’s commitment to the international agreements that it has adopted on this topic, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

The Constitution also lists special provisions for the protection and preservation of the environment. Articles 45 and 46 impose major political and social commitments for environment protection as one of the pillars of sustainable development.

Furthermore, the 2014 Constitution also aims to consolidate the values of democracy and freedom, ensuring the freedom to form political parties. Several articles were amended in 2019, and the amendments put in place additional guarantees to enhance the political participation of the most vulnerable, such as women, young people, persons with disabilities, workers and farmers, by ensuring their representation in the House of Representatives. In addition, in Article 218 the Constitution outlines the State’s commitment to combating corruption and enhancing the values of integrity and transparency.

In addition to the Constitution, governance represents one of the main components for achieving sustainable development. A common characteristic among developing countries that have achieved development progress is their adoption of key elements of good governance. Good governance (including the efficiency and efficacy of public services and rule of law) helps in achieving economic growth, as does the quality of institutions. The efficacy of governmental institutions is a major contributing factor in the reduction of poverty, as these institutions are the basis for achieving prosperity and growth. High-quality institutions help make investors feel secure
by enhancing issues related to intellectual property, the rule of law, and special incentives. Social and economic goals should be anchored by strong institutions, robust social insurance systems, citizens’ enjoyment of freedoms and suitable political representation, and a society anchored on participation and a widespread culture of anti-corruption.

Strengthening security and combating terrorism is another key component for a sustainable development process, as the dire consequences of terrorism can severely impact the process and hinder its achievement. The spread of terrorism and extremism also impacts the confidence of investors, limits foreign direct investment, reduces tourism and causes fear and distress for ordinary people. As a result, the prevalence of terrorism can limit people’s political and economic participation and their participation in decision-making processes. In recent years, Egypt, alongside most countries worldwide, has been subject to terrorist attacks that have affected developmental processes. Were it not for Egypt’s success in creating security and stability and combating terrorism over the past few years, the country would not have been able to achieve the developmental successes it has. It is therefore essential that security and combating terrorism are included among the governing principles of Egypt’s sustainable development process.

Egypt’s economic development vision since 2014 has been the continuation of its orientation towards a free economy and the primary role of the private sector alongside a greater role for the State. The State’s role is especially important in establishing and developing strong infrastructure that advances development and in providing more and better services for citizens, as well as its prioritization of the poor, as demonstrated by the construction of social housing projects, the reduction in the numbers of informal settlements, the social protection programmes, and several health initiatives and campaigns. These measures attempt to take into account the balance between considerations of comprehensive development in the long term and pressing problems and need to improve Egyptians’ living conditions in the short term.

Sustainable development will not be achieved without strengthening partnerships and regional, continental and international cooperation. Egypt is a pivotal country in the Middle East and North Africa and it is not focused only on the national scale on its path to achieving sustainable development. Egypt also assesses changes at the regional, continental and international level, especially in view of the difficult and volatile regional and global circumstances that threaten the Right to Development. The significance of partnerships and international cooperation in attaining sustainable development is reflected in Goal 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which outlines the importance of partnerships and cooperation to achieving sustainable development. Egypt is therefore aiming to make progress through boosting these partnerships and through openness to the international community in all its forms, as one of the most important governing principles for achieving sustainable development during the upcoming decade.

**Desired outcomes**

To achieve sustainable development, attention should be paid to all the developmental goals without distinction. In its progression towards sustainable development in the next decade, Egypt should deal with different structural issues to create a robust developmental push through focusing on all areas. One of the lessons learned from Egypt’s development progress over the past decade is that the partial addressing of some dimensions or levels are not the ones yielding major results. Accordingly, Egypt intends to focus on four basic themes as part of its plan to reinforce the path to achieving sustainable development: leveraging the level of human development in its various aspects; continuing the development push and ensuring inclusive growth; adapting to climate change and improving the environmental situation; upgrading the quality of services and the readiness of public institutions.
Improving all levels of human development

The concept of investment in people has gained attention from successive governments in Egypt, and as a result, various reforms and improvements to the health and education systems and right to adequate housing have been introduced. These reforms primarily aim to expand the provision of services. The next 10 years will witness continued commitment and a clear tendency in Egypt to introduce more radical reforms and real changes in investment in human capital, along with more focus on the dimensions related to quality and competitiveness.

In planning for investment in human capital, Egypt needs to consider the issues of overpopulation and poverty. The population issue is one of the main challenges that affects the development process as it still negatively impacts the returns of development, the quality of life of Egyptians, and the quality of services provided. It is both a cause of poverty and a result of it.

In light of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, Egypt needs to expand the adoption of the concept of investment in human capital to include five aspects: improving the quality of services in the field of public health; improving the quality of education to include digital skills; ensuring the provision of adequate housing; providing advanced and flexible social protection mechanisms; and boosting the empowerment of women in all fields.

Objectives for social protection include working on expanding the Takaful and Karama social safety net programme, with more scrutiny directed at targeting, especially of families living in extreme poverty. Another objective is to increase spending on subsidies and social grants, establishing and unifying databases for all components of the social protection system, strengthening institutional reform and coordinating between the non-governmental entities that provide social assistance and play protective roles such as religious institutions and NGOs. In addition, financial, institutional and human resources should be provided to ensure the effective implementation of both the Social Insurance and Pensions Law (Law No. 148 of 2019) and the Comprehensive Health Insurance Law (Law No. 2 of 2018), as they are the cornerstone of the new social and health insurance system, while supporting moves to eliminate any discrimination or disempowerment.

To further enhance the gains of women’s empowerment, the targeted objectives include building human capacities and strengthening gender-based planning; taking gender into consideration when conducting any statistical surveys; strengthening the follow-up and evaluation systems of programmes on women’s empowerment; and ensuring the correct and strict implementation of laws relevant to women’s rights. This is in addition to supporting interventions related to women’s political participation and working on raising awareness of gender issues and overcoming misconceptions, in coordination with civil society.
organizations, women’s empowerment mechanisms, the private sector, and the media.

**Strengthening the development push and ensuring inclusive growth**

Egypt has made significant achievements in development over recent years and these successes must be safeguarded and expanded, considering the global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of this crisis and other issues such as uncertainty and a scarcity of resources, Egypt is seeking to adopt economic and public policies that take into consideration readiness to manage risk.

In recent years, Egypt has sought to implement a national economic and social reform programme to bring about real structural change. In light of the global economic impacts of the pandemic, Egypt should continue to advance this programme in order to transform its economy into a productive, knowledge-based economy that has competitive capabilities on the global stage. Egypt should focus on productive activities, particularly industry, in accordance with national goals and in conformity with the private sector, which has a key role to play in the development process. It has proven clear that, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, economies that depend on manufacturing industries performed better during both the crisis and the recovery stages.

To continue progressing its development pathway over the next 10 years, Egypt will also seek to continue its efforts towards structural reform, with a focus on productive activities, and on fostering a business environment that will allow the private sector to play an appropriate role in these activities. It will also seek to reduce the negative effects resulting from Egypt’s rising debt service through better management of public debt. It is also seeking to lift customs and non-customs export restrictions and to simplify procedures to boost exports and competition. Furthermore, Egypt will work to support economic policy analysis at the level of decision-making so that it goes beyond the analysis of macro indicators, to assess the extent to which Egyptians’ Right to Development has been fulfilled and how well the country’s overall economic performance is reflected in their living conditions. It should also analyse the extent to which the distribution of the proceeds of development is equitable, both in terms of individual and regional distribution. Moreover, Egypt is also aiming to promote the optimal use of resources by continuing its efforts to move away from energy subsidies, especially of petroleum and electricity, which are consumed most by the highest income groups. Instead, it will continue to subsidize food and those social programmes that benefit the poorest most, in order to increase distributive justice and overcome poverty.

During the next decade, Egypt is seeking to implement the second phase of its national economic and social reform programme. The programme targets, for the first time, the real economy with serious and purposeful structural reforms, by transforming the Egyptian economy into a productive economy based on knowledge and competitive capabilities in the global economy. This aims to encourage inclusive growth, create decent and productive job opportunities, diversify and develop production patterns, improve the investment climate and business environment, localize industries, and increase the competitiveness of Egyptian exports to achieve sustainable economic development and comprehensive and sustainable economic growth.

The programme includes six pillars, classified into a main pillar that aims to restructure the Egyptian economy with a focus on the real economy, and other, complementary pillars, which include: the business environment and the development of the role of the private sector, the flexibility of the labour market and increased efficiency of vocational training; human capital (education, health, social protection); financial inclusion and access to finance; and the efficiency of public institutions, governance and digital transformation.

The first and main pillar includes three productive sectors which have also been iden-
The productive sectors that have been identified are the agricultural sector, the technology-intensive manufacturing sector, and the communications and information technology sector. In parallel with the implementation of the various pillars of the structural reform programme, there will be support for the service sectors that complement and support the productive sectors, and which are able to create job opportunities and provide foreign currency. These sectors include logistics, the construction sector, and the tourism sector, in addition to enhancing the green economy.

Adapting to climate change and improving environmental conditions

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the urgent need to restore balance to the relationship between mankind and the natural world, and pandemic recovery measures must therefore also be coupled with moves to tackle climate change. Egypt is highly vulnerable to climate change and faces many risks that threaten its environmental sustainability, and which can be exacerbated by its growing population’s increasing demands on an already limited resource base, and the continuing decrease in its freshwater share per capita.

Egypt has made significant progress over the past few years in establishing the institutional framework for dealing with climate risks and developing qualified national capabilities. However, there is an urgent need to develop national capacity with respect to climate science research, in order to better understand climate change and its impacts on coastal areas, water resources and human health. Consumption patterns in Egypt have seen radical changes in recent decades, supported by economic growth, technological developments and social and cultural factors, and this has exacerbated waste-related problems.

To address this issue, Egypt is targeting a number of goals in the decade of achievements, including work on changing consumption habits through education and public awareness, and moves towards building a circular economic model by expanding both recycling and reuse processes. In addition, Egypt is aiming to direct government spending and procurement towards green services and products, to continue promoting the new trend towards green bonds, and to foster a better understanding of the interrelationship between water, energy, food and climate policy. This understanding is important in creating an informed framework to identify the trade-offs and synergies that meet the demands for these resources, without compromising sustainability.

During the upcoming decade, Egypt will continue the implementation of new policies for the development of the solid waste management system and will finalize the ambitious programme to purify Egyptian lakes and develop and maximize their utilization. It will also complete the programme of cleaning and lining of irrigation canals and drains to deal effectively with the issue of water scarcity.
Upgrading the quality of services and the readiness of public institutions

Public services provided by the State to citizens include water and sanitation services, health care, infrastructure, transportation, lands registration systems, and the issuing of licenses, among others. Citizens usually evaluate governmental performance as a whole through their experiences in obtaining these services, as they are considered the main channel for communication between the people and public institutions, and function as an expression of the principles of governance. The delivery of good public services is characterized by effectiveness in reaching targeted groups and the efficient use of available resources, and accordingly, public services become more competent and efficient when they are closer to citizens and their actual needs. A shift towards systematic decentralization based on protection of the interests of the State and citizens thus boosts efficiency in the provision of services, as a result of the closeness of local bodies to the needs of citizens and their ability to provide better-quality services based on those needs.

The provision of services is linked with the issue of justice, and Egypt will work in the coming decade on providing basic services efficiently and effectively to all citizens, including the poorest, in order to achieve justice among members of society. The link between the concept of justice and the provision of services is due to citizens’ levels of satisfaction with public services increases when justice, i.e., distribution of resources and provision of services to the most vulnerable, is taken into consideration.

**Box 7.1 Nature conservation**

- UNDP is a lead agency in nature conservation. It supports 18 out of 30 protected areas in Egypt which have global significance. This includes basic services in protected areas to help upgrade these areas to world-class eco-touristic sites, in addition to public awareness and capacity-building. These areas include, but are not limited to, Wadi Al-Hitan, or “the valley of the whales,” and the climate change museum in Fayoum, which is the first of its kind in the Middle East. The museum displays rare fossils of whales that date back over a million years.

- UNDP uses a distinct approach to implementation that seeks to involve local communities in the protection of the environment through community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). This approach also helps local communities generate incomes.

- In Egypt, approximately 80% of inbound and local travellers visit the Red Sea region, one of the most sensitive remaining biodiversity hubs in the world. However, the increasing influx of tourists to the area has created additional pressure on its ecosystem through issues such as waste generation, littering, unsustainable diving, snorkelling practices, and the feeding and collection of marine species.

- UNDP, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, launched a marine conservation campaign which aims to protect the Red Sea’s marine and coastal environment and to alleviate the pressures placed on its ecosystem, through a series of awareness-raising videos, posters and billboards. The campaign was the first of its kind in the MENA region.

- The campaign was part of Eco Egypt, a nationwide campaign which aims to give the public information about these protected areas, such as their unique features, where to stay when visiting, activities for visitors, and who to meet among the local communities.
During the next decade, Egypt will seek to improve the quality of public services by advancing efforts around digital transformation and simplifying governmental procedures. It will also empower local administration by accelerating the issuing of laws on public planning and local administration, as well as by increasing the investments directed to the governorates according to financing formulae that take into account the development disparities between the different governorates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for public institutions that are ready to respond to and manage crises effectively, and that are able to carry out their responsibilities and allow citizens continuous access to facilities at times of crisis. In this regard, in its quest to achieve sustainable development, Egypt seeks to enhance the readiness of public institutions and their ability to swiftly respond to crises, and to build the human and institutional capacities required to deal with crises, before, during and after they occur. This is to ensure the existence of a strong administrative apparatus capable of addressing crises, and that is responsive to the needs of citizens. This can be achieved by strengthening systems for risk analysis, foresight, and capacity-building to deal with crises.

**Necessary implementation mechanisms**

To ensure that progress is made in achieving the intended goals during the next decade, there are a set of necessary means for implementation that should be considered, as listed below.

- **Financing for development**

Egypt has long faced – and still faces – difficulties in financing development and in limited domestic resources, low saving rates, and weak flows of needed and expected foreign investment. The resources required for the coming decade of achievements, especially in light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, means that Egypt may need to rethink existing development financing mechanisms adopted by the State. In its pursuit of achieving sustainable development, Egypt is pursuing an approach to strengthening alternative financing instruments, such as public-private partnerships, corporate social responsibility and impact investments, green and SDG bonds, debt swaps, and others, as well as building on and utilizing the efforts of the country’s sovereign wealth fund as an important financing tool.

**Box 7.2 SDGs’ impact and impact investment**

- Before the pandemic, it was estimated that an additional $2.4 trillion a year would be needed to achieve the 17 SDGs’ 169 specific targets across the world by 2030, with 50% of this investment needed in developing countries. COVID-19 has further reinforced the necessity of investing in social and environmental sustainability. The size of investment needed, however, is beyond the means of the public sector. As in many other countries, Egypt’s public finances are facing constraints in terms of limiting debt, and public investment cannot match all SDG financing needs in the short term.

- This gap calls for alternative financing mechanisms. A large portion of the investment required will need to come from the private sector. Private sector investment and private sector activities mobilize large volumes of financing for their daily activities, and there is space to shift activities away from areas that may cause harm and towards those that benefit people and the planet, without diminishing profitability.
Data availability

Data and information are essential elements of the efficiency and effectiveness of any organization. Accurate data provides a comprehensive picture to allow decision makers to make sound decisions and contributes significantly to monitoring and evaluation processes. One of the most important challenges facing development in Egypt is the problem of deficiencies in databases that are needed for advanced analysis and planning approaches, and the poor predictability of the likely effects of various policy alternatives. Egypt is therefore endeavouring to develop and reform its data and statistics system and to link different databases. These efforts will be a cornerstone for the implementation of the path to achieving sustainable development.

Promoting digital transformation

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its various economic and social impacts, there is considerable momentum around digital transformation that could provide an opportunity. The issue is of great importance, as has been proven during the pandemic, and which proved the value of investment in it in past years. Accordingly, promoting digital transformation and continuing to adopt policies and approaches that support it will help accelerate the pace of work and achieve the desired outcomes of the decade of achievements. By adopting laws supporting digital transformation and ensuring safe internet use and promoting investment, Egypt seeks to consider digital transformation as part of a bigger framework; namely that of digital inclusion, ensuring that all individuals, including those most in need, have access to digital services and have the required skills to adapt to its numerous advantages and share in its benefits.

Box 7.2 SDGs' Impact and Impact investment (continued)

- Business managers and investors, as well as business associations, are increasingly investing in new opportunities associated with the SDGs, which can be as profitable or more profitable than mainstream business opportunities.

- Leading firms in Egypt are already championing sustainability reporting, and several private equity funds are already committing their investments to making a positive impact. But there is a need to go further and more systematically in helping private capital and enterprises direct their efforts toward the SDGs in meaningful, measurable ways.

- The government is leading by example through the Environmental Sustainability Standards Guide: The Strategic Framework for Green Recovery, created by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and the Ministry of Environment. This will be applied to all public investments and can also inspire private investment decision-making. Also, to help businesses establish strategies and governance that creates impact, UNDP and OECD have teamed up at the global level to produce the Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Development, which can be applied to business management, private equity investments and bond issuances.
**Box 7.3 Digital transformation**

- There is no doubt about the current and future role of digital technologies in economic and social development, which is characterized by equity and inclusivity. Egypt has made significant efforts in the field of digital transformation, crystalized in strengthening the development of ICT infrastructure, improving digital services in government institutions, and increasing the quality and efficiency of services by enhancing working environments and supporting the decision-making process.

- The existence of a national strategy and action plans for institutions’ and citizens’ capacity-building regarding future technologies and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, especially artificial intelligence, is important to integrate into the next vision. UNDP and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology are developing a project to support the ministry’s Applied Innovation Centre in the field of artificial intelligence.

- Financial inclusion and wider adoption of digital payments is being encouraged, including the implementation of regulatory reforms in the regulations and infrastructure of electronic customer identification and digital identity verification systems, which UNDP is supporting through Egypt Post.

- Despite the gradual growth of e-commerce activities in Egypt over the past five years, usage remains limited. It is much lower than in other, similar economies, and much of it is informal. This is an opportunity to attract new e-commerce investments, including the use of B2C and B2B applications and services, as well as support for logistics and distribution services. E-commerce has the potential to integrate micro, small and medium-sized enterprises into domestic and global supply chains and to help them maintain their operations, despite the decline in actual retail activities.

- UNDP pays great attention to the development of assistive technology for people with disabilities that can ensure inclusivity, support their integration within communities, and allow them to benefit from the outcomes of digital transformation.

**Development of human capacities**

Developing the capabilities of the employees of Egypt’s public administration apparatus clearly contributes to enhancing the efficiency of managing national resources and bolstering the provision of public services. An ongoing process to develop the capacities of public sector employees must therefore be adopted in line with new trends in public administration such as digitization and data analysis, among others, to support the implementation of the sustainable development plan for the decade of achievements. The executive plan for training civil servants who will be relocated to Egypt’s New Administrative Capital may also represent a real opportunity for this development, while continuing to include mainstream capacity development.