

March 12, 2014

Dear President Kim,

In October 2013, the World Bank Group approved a new corporate strategy with two goals: extreme poverty reduction and shared prosperity. The new strategy adopted citizen engagement as an essential approach to achieving these goals, recognizing that citizens in developing countries ought to be at the heart of development and that they should, therefore, be the drivers of the development process.

A team inside the Bank has been tasked with developing a strategy that would enumerate the principles, guidelines, and instruments that are needed to streamline citizen engagement across Bank operations. The strategy aims to enable citizens to be effectively and meaningfully engaged in the entire development process. Accordingly, it follows that citizens should have an active hand in developing the Bank policies that affect them at all levels. They should play a key role in the framing and review of the Systematic Country Diagnostics of their countries as well as the Country Partnership Frameworks that follow. Citizens also should take part in designing the programs and projects that affect their communities, and in the monitoring of these operations' implementation.

We, civil society organizations in the Arab region, are very pleased to see the Bank moving in the direction of citizen engagement and think it has the potential for highly improved development outcomes, especially during this time in our region. We know all too well the importance of being engaged in development processes: As a result of years of being excluded from such decisions, the peoples of our region, including civil society organizations like ourselves, rose up and demanded to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect our lives. We continue to be part of this transformative effort to make our voices heard at all stages of development, and this is why we are concerned about the process through which the Bank is designing the citizen engagement strategy itself.

Given that the purpose of this strategy is to enable citizens of developing countries to be engaged in the development processes that affect them, we would hope that the Bank would ensure their engagement in the actual design of this strategy. Unfortunately, we are seeing the Bank limiting engagement in this strategy to face-to-face consultations with CSOs in *developed countries*; a consultation took place in London on 17 February 2014 with Brussels joining via video conference, and another is scheduled to take place in Washington, DC in mid-March 2014. Meanwhile, the intended targets of this strategy – citizens in *developing countries* – who know their contexts best, are only able to provide input through the Bank's online consultation hub.

We, the undersigned organizations, would like to express our deep concern that the Bank's "Citizen Engagement Strategy" is being developed in a way that seems to contradict the very goal and title of this same strategy and in the absence of meaningful engagement of citizens in our region. **We highly recommend that face-to-face consultations be prioritized in the Arab region where elements of this strategy are already being piloted in select projects, and that as the strategy is scaled up, citizens, including CSOs, are consulted on how it should be implemented at the individual country level.** This is more than a matter of principle; proactively seeking the inputs of citizens in developing countries will ensure that the strategy adopted is applicable and feasible to the targeted populations and that there is citizen buy-in from the outset. More importantly, this is in line with the Bank's stated commitment to engage citizens of the region and its efforts to change its discourse in the wake of the Arab uprisings.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to receiving a positive response from you soon.

Sincerely,

Arab NGO Network for Development – REGIONAL

Disabled People's International - Arab Regional Office – REGIONAL

Egyptian Association for Collective Rights – EGYPT

Egyptian Center for Civil and Legislative Reform – EGYPT

Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights – EGYPT

Habitat International Coalition/Housing and Land Rights Network – REGIONAL/EGYPT

Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union – LEBANON

Middle East Advocacy and Research Center – LEBANON

Min Haqqy – YEMEN

Resonate! Yemen – YEMEN

Studies & Economic Media Center – YEMEN

Touensa – TUNISIA

Tunisian Association for Digital Freedom – TUNISIA

Wedyan Association for Society Development – YEMEN

Yemen Parliamentarians Against Corruption – YEMEN