**Final Narrative Report**

**EMR - SDGs Learning Platform**

**Prepared by**

**SRC**

**Date:**

**November 30, 2020**

**Introduction:**

This narrative report provides a brief summary of the activities, and performance. The first section of the report reviews the expectations from this first phase and the objectives. The second section reports on methodology, activities and outputs.. The last section discusses the fulfillment of the objectives in terms of achievements, challenges, as well as future sustainability plans.

**I. Expectations and objectives**

The activities of the first phase of this platform was supported by the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (AHPSR) to SRC for a period of 18 months ending October 30, 2020. The support targeted: ‘Building a regional learning mechanism for health-related SDGs in the Eastern Mediterranean Region’. It was foreseen as a first step in capitalizing on the opportunities of the SDGs to contribute to the realization of national aspirations.

The goals of this first step cover:

* Better understanding the policy context and the dynamics of implementations.
* Building on the potential value of knowledge transfer channels, that draw on the diversity in the Arab region, to document the existent development models in the region as well as facilitate sharing of experiences, policy solutions, lessons and best practices.
* Providing space for crowd sourcing and civic engagement.

As stated “The proposed Arab SDG platform aspires to provide the required infrastructure for such knowledge exchange channel and networking forum.” The proposed infrastructure comprises both a virtual space and a network. The proposed activities list the following six objectives for this infrastructure.

1. Provide a one stop resource site (portal) of relevant information.
2. Produce a critical comparative analysis of different modalities and approaches of country experiences.
3. Share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in SDG implementations.
4. Serve as a networking platform for broader engagement from non-governmental stakeholders.
5. Work as an interactive space for multi – stakeholder policy dialogue and informed debate.
6. Facilitate the production and disseminations of tangible think pieces.

**II – Methodology, activities and outputs**

**II – 1) Methodology**

SRC served as the leader and coordinator. A focal point from AHPSR (Dr. Aku Kwamie) and Dr. Wasiq Khan (Division of Healthier Population, WHO/EMRO), provided a supportive monitoring and consultative role.

The implementation process identified partnerships, formation of an advisory board, use of social media and newsletters as elements contributing to different activities and the achievements of objectives. A report on each of these follows.

**Partnerships**

1. League of Arab states

A crucial partner in the proposed activities was identified from the start as the Directorate for Sustainable Development and International Collaboration of the League of Arab states (DSDIC/LAS).

The partnership between SRC/AUC and DSDIC/LAS was seen as essential as it serves an opportunity for wider political leverage and impact.

The partnership with DSDIC/LAS was secured early on. Such partnership allowed DSDIC to be presented on the advisory board of the platform. It also secured the participation of the platform in the meetings organized by DSDIC with formal SDG country coordinators. In particular the meeting held during the Arab week for sustainable development from 3rd to 6th November 2019 in Cairo was attended by three team members of the platform. The director of DSDIC actively participated in all the platform activities and gave a keynote presentation in the second webinar that was co-organized jointly by the platform and DSDIC/LAS. Also, the platform was invited to contribute in a session planned in Dubai Expo 2020. This session was not held due to travel constrains of Covid – 19.

The partnership with DSDIC not only contributed to wider outreach of the platform and its different activities, but also provided relevant information on the SDG related activities of this partner in the Arab region.

(<https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/Webinar%20on%2015oct/Nada%20Al-Agizy.mp4>).

The partnership with DSDIC/LAS also provided an entry point to a new potential donor (UNESCO) for a second phase of the platform to be described later.

2. Four national partners

The proposal specified partnerships with national institutions in four Arab countries. The role of these institutions, as stated in the proposal is to engage in launching and contributing to the regional platform. Such engagement is through the representation of these partner institutions in two partners’ meetings, as well as their participation in a larger meeting with a wider group of stakeholders.

The formal partnerships with three high level national institutions were also secured early on. These institutions are:

* Directorate for Sustainable Development and International Cooperation & League of Arab States.
* Ministry of Planning and Development, Egypt.
* High Health Council, Jordan.
* National Observatory for Human Development, Morocco.

Also, close contacts were made with:

* National Population Council, Sudan.

Such partnerships were very valuable and served their intended purposes as described below.

The partnership in Egypt allowed the platform to join forces with the highest body leading the SDG implementation. The Deputy Minister was entrusted to oversee all aspects of the collaboration. The Head of the Sustainable Development Unit in the Ministry of Planning was designated as the coordinator. She served as a member of advisory board, shared all relevant documents, attended first partner meeting, informed the Minister of different platform activities. The Minister did accept to provide a keynote address to the second Webinar organized by platform, but unfortunately this did not materialize, as scheduling a common appropriate time for her and other speakers proved difficult due to her many commitments.

The second partner was the National Observatory for Human Development (ONDH), which reports directly to the Prime Minister of Morocco. A higher-level delegation, representing a diverse group of key stakeholders, attended the first partner meeting. The SDG experience of Morocco was discussed in details in this meeting.

In addition, the Observatory was a contributor to the first webinar organized by platform. The contributions shared information on how Morocco investigated and catered for the equity consideration in relation to Covid – 19. This information was intended to encourage other countries to mainstream equity in their Covid efforts, and also provided very much needed tools. Furthermore, another learning opportunity on SDG Morocco experience was capitalized on in a commissioned SDG progress report. The author of the report was Dr. Rajae El-Aouda who is an advisor to the Ministry of Health in Morocco. Her co-author is Mr. Abdelilah El Marnissi Statistician Engineer, Head of Planning and Studies Division, Ministry of Health, Morocco.

The third partner country was Jordan. It was represented by the High Health Council chaired by Ministry of Health. A large team, nominated by Minister, participated in the first partnership meeting. The team included the Secretary General of the High Health Council. In addition to other key members.

During the first partners meeting, a full report on SDG experience in Jordan was presented. Also, the Jordanian team requested more detailed information of the two new tools presented in the meeting. These tools covered localizing the SDGs as well as how to investigate and measure inequities. The tools were shared and posted later on the platform. The members of the Jordanian team continued to be in close contact with platform activities. One member of Jordan team was awarded a research grant.

Sudan did not engage in a formal partnership, but contacts were made with the High Population Council which was entrusted with coordinating the SDG agenda. Similar to other partners, the experience of Sudan was investigated in the platform activites. After one of the platform webinars, a scholar from Ahfad University for Women, provided an intervention on the case of Sudan (Link: <https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/Webinar%20on%20COVID-19/The%20Case%20of%20Sudan.pdf>).

The partnerships in the four countries proved valuable in making accessible country specific information. The knowledge gained contributed to the substantiative report and such knowledge complemented the findings from the analysis of voluntary report, the commissioned studies, the literature posted on virtual platform. In addition, the partnerships allowed the exchange of experiences and learning of new tools.

Clearly, the four country partnerships served their intended purpose in providing needed details of country experiences for the benefits of both the platform content and the substantiative final report. It also served and strengthened the learning edge of the platform.

3 - Second Tier of Partners

The platform succeeded in introducing a second tier of partnerships. These included three additional partners. The partnership networks aim at efficiently pooling together the expertise of a diverse set of regional actors. Compatibility of vision and goals and complementarity of focuses and approaches are the guiding principles of the network building.

The objectives of this second tier are to expand the outreach of the platform, to build on the complementarity of topics of concern, to contribute to the activities and outputs of other partners.

The three partners added to the platform are: The Arab Science and Teaching Network for Sustainable Development (ASTNSD), the Middle East and North Africa Research on Aging Healthy (MENARAH), and Covid-19 Family Life Study.

Details on these partners are posted on the virtual platform. Also, details on the networking activities are described in the progress reports provided earlier.

In brief, ASTNSD is envisioned within SDG 17. The technical secretariat is comprised of prominent regional scientific organizations aiming at promoting and vitalizing the contributions of scientific research centers and the academia in implementing The 2020 SDGs. The EMR-SDG Learning Platform (represented by SRC) is currently a formal member of ASTNSD secretariat. A virtual platform has already been designed and will include links to EMR-SDG platform. Also, a virtual meeting that will included further discussions to consolidate the partnership is planned for December 3, 2020.

MANARAH, is an international network that brings together those interested in healthy ageing research across the Middle East and North Africa for the purpose of enabling an effective response to population aging in the region. The MENARAH virtual site has been launched and included an opening address by director of SRC emphasizing the strengths of the two partners and how they can contribute to SDGs. As a starting point, MENARAH and the EMR-SDGs platform are providing links to each other and plan to report on relevant findings in their respective portals. Also, the platform is considering adding the topical concern ‘healthy ageing’ to its selected topics. This addition captures the importance of this lifecycle phase which has not received its fair share of research and policy attention.

Plans for the second phase of the platform include discussion with UNFPA/ASRO to support this new topical concern. Also, a collaborative activity with the Institute of Global Health and Human Ecology at AUC, and a good number of international partners has received seed funding towards joining the international effort anchored on a standard longitudinal international survey on healthy ageing (HRS).

The inclusion of Covid-19 family life study as a partner is intended to draw attention to the findings of this ambitious regional initiative that address a knowledge vacuum in the region.

**ii – Advisory Board**

The advisory board, consisting of a distinguished group of regional experts on development and health, was formed and held its first face to face meeting during the preparatory phase of activities (July 7, 2019). Contacts with members of the advisory board continued informally and many of them supported the wider circulation of platform events. Also, many members contributed to the activities and webinars of platform.

**iii – Social Media Outlets**

The platform started to employ social media to increase its audience and propagate the sharing of ideas on its featured topics. This approach is tested through a Covid-19 centered discussion on Facebook. More than 200 likes have been generated so far. A summary of the discussion is posted on the COMMUNITY section of the platform. The link to the discussion is (<https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=132728005061540&id=103787461288928>).

**II.2) Activities**

The activities are:

1. Preparatory activities to identify partners, collaborating teams, advisory board.
2. Review of other national and regional efforts and platforms.
3. Advisory and stakeholders board meetings.
4. Two roundtable meetings with partners.
5. Developing the structure and contents of the portal. Updating
6. Using social media for exchange of information and sharing knowledge.
7. Developing policy briefs on selected topics.
8. Technical assistance and engagement with DSDIC. (Policy dialogues).
9. Compiling and distributing quarterly newsletters.
10. Documentation, Dissemination and Sustainability (large meeting).

The ten activities specified were preformed, with the exception of planned meetings as these could not be implemented due to COVID– 19 restrictions. Such activities were replaced by two webinars.

**II.3) Outputs**

The outputs, in addition to designing and hosting platform, included:

1. Designing social media
2. Newsletters
3. Policy relevant outputs
4. Substantive Report and Recommendations for Sustainability

The outputs covered a FACEBOOK page , and 3 newsletters in both English and Arabic ‘https://emrsdgslearn.net/Misc/newsletter’. This section describes in some details the policy relevant outputs, and the virtual portal..

* **Policy Relevant Outputs**

The policy relevant outputs are produced within the different activities of the platform. These activities covered partnership meeting, commissioning reports, awarding research pieces, two webinars, as well as different pieces shared on platform.

The following lists outputs under their many sources

Summary list and description of outputs

A – Partner meeting

- Presentations of representatives from partner institutions in the three countries of Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. These presentations discussed in the main features of the 2030 sustainable development agenda, especially its health-related components, in each of these countries. Ongoing challenges were also discussed. (<https://emrsdgslearn.net/News/1>)

B - Commissioned reports

The Commissioned Reports served two purposes. The first investigating comparative experiences and drawing lessons, while the second emphasized the development of tools responding to needs of implementation.

Within the first purpose, an investigation of governance issues was performed through critical readings of 9 voluntary reports, as well as an assessment of the achievement of health-related targets at sub-regional classifications accompanied by in-depth investigations of the achievements in the four partner countries.

Within the second purpose, three tools were developed.

The commissioned reports are:

1. Analysis of Voluntary National Reports (VNR). (<https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/VNR%20Reading%20Report%20Revised.pdf>)
2. Regional SDG Progress Report and a case study of Morocco. (<https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/health%20SDGs%20report%20final.pdf>)
3. Performance of Partner Arab Countries on SDG Health Related Goals. (https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/performance\_of\_the\_four\_partners\_countries.pdf)
4. Analytical Approach to move from Health-to-Health Equity in SDGs, with Case Study of Jordan JPFHS 2017.

(<https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/From%20health%20to%20health%20equity%20SDGsf.ppsx>)
5. A tool to localize SDG with illustration from Egypt. ( <https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/VID-20200809-WA0010.mp4>)
6. An overview of UHC with emphasis on UHC status in the EMR and the Arab region. (https://emrsdgslearn.net/Content/uhc)

C - Research awards

The awarded research pieces, contributed by young, early- and mid-career researchers and practitioners, probed into a diverse set of topics with clear policy relevance. (reports: <https://emrsdgslearn.net/Content/Research%20Papers>

 and six policy briefs<https://emrsdgslearn.net/Content/policy>).

1. [Can Universal Health Coverage Systems Achieve Health Equity? Institutional Lessons Learnt from A Set of Countries To The Newly Born System In Egypt.](https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/UHC%20and%20Equity%20Lessons%20for%20Egypt.pdf)
2. [Measuring Performance Among Community Midwives in Low-Resource Settings: A Mixed-Methods Study in Sudan.](https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/Performance%20of%20community%20midwives%20in%20Sudan.pdf)
3. [Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) In the Middle East And North Africa: What Macroeconomic Savings Can Be Expected From Achieving SDG Target 3.4?](https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/Cost%20of%20NCDs.pdf)
4. [Between Herd Immunity and Suppression: A Modelling Study Assessing Alternative Policy Responses To COVID-19 In Jordan.](https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/COVID19%20Policy%20in%20Jordan.pdf)
5. [Unpacking Readiness For M-Health in Emergency Settings.](https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/Unpacking%20Readiness%20for%20m-Health.pdf)
6. [COVID-19 And Health Services in Egypt.](https://files.emrsdgslearn.net/uploads/COVID-19%20and%20health%20services%20in%20Egypt.pdf)

D - Webinar: COVID 19 inequities in Arab countries (<https://emrsdgslearn.net/News/21>)

1. Intervention of the National Observatory for Human Development in Morocco.
2. Research on COVID 19 Inequities in Morocco.

3. Findings of a study on Inequalities Related to Covid 19 in Egypt.
4. COVID 19 Inequity in Egypt, What do we know? and what should we do?
as well as,
5. Three Commentaries by the Director, Healthier Population Division, World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; Regional Director UN women
Regional Office for the Arab States; and Regional Director, UNFPA Arab States Regional Office.
6. Unsolicited contribution from a scholar in Sudan.

E - Webinar on Policies needed to support achieving the sustainable development goals, taking into consideration the many current challenges in the Arab Region (<https://emrsdgslearn.net/News/29>)

1. Keynote address on the efforts of LAS.

2. Health-related SDGs progress in selected Arab countries.

3. Innovative solutions for the future.

4. What policies are needed or possible in the current geopolitical context of the Arab region.

F – Knowledge shared on the virtual platform

The knowledge shared covered a wide array of issues carefully selected to serve the learning edge and regional focus. The convening and interaction functions of the virtual platform was directed to emphasize the three central targets of SDG 3: NCDs, SRH, and UHC. In addition, the platform did recognize regional specificities and targeted informing and supporting stakeholders to adopt SDH framing and to mainstream equity.

Of particular relevance to the current synthesis are the ‘Featured for You’ section of the platform that emphasizes paradigm shifts in addressing health goals, as well as recent regional reports and analytical findings posted under topical concerns.

* **Virtual Portal**

‘[www.Emrsdgslearn.net](http://www.Emrsdgslearn.net)’

The platform aims at “contributing to the collaborative ethos of the SDG agenda through connecting stakeholders in the Arab region”. The virtual platform is an important mechanism for connectivity. It targets and liaises between the three groups of: researchers, policy makers and civil society actors.

The portal has evolved considerably to reach its current design stage. The learning edge, the regional specificity, the underlying pillars and binding threads were carefully explained and catered for in the design, selected contents of the portal and their organizations.

The learning pays special attention to:

* Regional specificities.
* Policy level determinants.
* Social determinants framing.
* Equity lens.

The coherence of the virtual platform is reflected in its structure, contents, and organization which allows the following:

i. Clear articulation of the mission and criteria for selection of contents.

The section on “who we are” describes the underlying vision, the pillars adopted as well

as the binding threads for all sections.

ii. Sharing and drawing lessons from country experiences

Relevant sections: COUTNRIES; RESOURCES; COMMUNNITIES; PUBLICATIONS.

These cover many analytical efforts (e.g., voluntary national reviews, SDGs progress reports, commissioned analyses…).

iii. Learning new knowledge, skills and tolls

Relevant sections: TOPICS; RESOURCES; PUBLICATIONS.

The Learning New Knowledge, Skills, and Tools is not only reflected in different sections of the platform but also in the organization of the topical contents into three categories. The first includes easy access to carefully chosen relevant pieces of knowledge, the second covers specific regional findings, and the third provides tools and resources.

Many new findings and tools were commissioned through platform and posted examples of these include: comparison of SDG governance, comparison on progress of SDG, experiences in implementation of UHC, learning from country efforts in accessing equity concerns in relation to Covid, tools on how to perform equity analysis, tools on how to localize SDGs to ensure equity, country specific analysis, etc….

iv. Emphasizing the three central targets of SDG3: NCD, SRH, UHC.

Relevant sections: TOPICS; PUBLICATIONS

v. Recognizing regional and country level specificities.

Relevant sections: introducing EMERGENCIES and CONFLICTS to the topics, separate subsections on REGIONAL SPECIFIC FINDINGS, Commissioned reports, using Arabic and including Arabic recourses.

vi. Informing and supporting stakeholders to adopt SDH framing to mainstream equity lens.

Relevant sections: TOPIC; RESOUCES; PUBLICATIONS.

The SDH framing and Equity mainstreaming is provided in special analytical pieces posted on the platform (e.g: The regional SRH inequity analysis, the Jordan health inequalities analysis, the SDG progress report,…). The equity lens is considered in all analytical tools, in the development of tools, in the discussion of virtual meetings.

vii. Encourage networking and interactions.

Relevant sections: COMMUNITY, Our Network; Get Involved; home page revolving item; TOPICS <e.g. adding healthy aging and linking to MENARAH>).

**III – Performance, Challenges and Sustainability**

The six stated objectives were pursued and served as follows:

1. Provide a one stop shop resource site (portal) of relevant information.

The portal is a very rich well-organized virtual site. Its significance has considerably increased following the Covid-19 constraints.

As promised, the portal documents international, regional, and national experiences and practices related to SDGs. It provides analytical prices that compare governance structures for SDG as well as follow-up on SDGs progress in the Arab Region, share tools for effective implementation, feature relevant articles, provide synthesis of deliverables between different stakeholders.

It also allows space for interactions and stakeholders contribution, as well as identify relevant national and regional findings and links to sites.

1. Produce a critical comparative analysis of different modalities and approaches of country experiences.

The final substantiative report “Knowledge Synthesis”, draws on all the activities, interactions and analytical comparative studies to produce learnings and recommendations of features necessary for effective implementations and realization of goals.

1. Share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in SDG implementation.

The documents shared during the partners meeting, the analysis of voluntary reports and the findings of research grants contributed to the analytical report on ‘Knowledge Synthesis’. In addition, the portal also covered key pieces of literature relevant to policy solutions, practices and challenges.

1. Serve as a networking platform for broader engagement from non-governmental stakeholders.

The dissemination of platform announcements and newsletters cover the database of SRC (1100 members), as well as wider circulation through other regional networks (such as: Phaw, HPF, Bassera, ERF,…).

The networking functions could be demonstrated through visits and contributions to the virtual platform, participation in activities, responding to announcements in terms of platform. The number of visitors to the virtual platform exceeded 2750 (not counting repeat visits). In terms of participation in activities, the two webinars organized by the platform has witnessed key interventions from senior scholars and international development experts. They attracted registration from 255 interested stakeholders. The Facebook modality received more than 200 likes.As for platform announcements, the research grants competition attracted a large number of submission and resulted in six awarded grants.

1. Work as an interactive space for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue and informed debate. The interactive space was made feasible through community section, the Facebook page, as well as the two webinars.
2. Facilitate the production and dissemination of tangible think pieces.

The large number of platform outputs provided earlier demonstrate the adequate performance on this goal.

**III.2 Challenges**

The three key challenges facing the platform relate to the networking with four partner institutions, COVID -19 disruption, as well as the future sustainability of the platform.

In terms of the networking, the four partners, while willing to engage in the platform activities, did not appear to draw on the platform outputs to support their implementation efforts.

The partnerships did not directly impact the partners policies and modality of implementations. A contribution of such an impact could have been achieved through the partners making the efforts to draw on the shared experiences and making use of the platform and tools provided. Also, such an influence requires more ownership from the partners institutions. It is believed that a second phase of the platform could target joint activities responding to specific priorities and articulated needs in the partners institutions.

It is important to emphasize that the goals of the platform did not explicitly target influencing SDGs efforts at the level of partner countries. However, we believe that the potentials of achieving such a goal were constrained by a number of impediments.

First and foremost, the travel restrictions of COVID – 19 did not allow the second face to face partners meeting. Such a meeting could have built on the excellent exchanges and support of the first partner meeting to achieve institutional impact.

More importantly, the attention of the partners, particularly in Jordan and Sudan, was significantly diverted away from the activities of the platform. This may be explained by a number of factors. In Jordan, the energy of partner institution (being the MoH) was totally occupied by the handling of the emergencies associated with COVID 19. In addition, the Secretary General of the HHC in Jordan retired and the transitional phase associated with change in leaderships affected the interaction with Jordan partner.

Similarly, Sudan partnerships was strongly influenced by political developments. On the one hand the mandate of coordinating SDG moved from Sudan National Population Council and has been entrusted to Ministry of Finance. This of course reflects the concern with resource constraints in Sudan, but is bound to influence the adopted development lens. In addition, to the changing mandate of the partners institution. The director of NPC (who had a long previous collaborative relation with SRC was replaced. This also influenced the level of formal interaction in Sudan. It should be noted however that the contacts with individual scholars from Sudan remained active.

The future sustainability of the platform is another cause of concern to be discussed in the next section.

**III.3 Sustainability**

SRC values the platform and is making every effort to sustain it and develop it further. The initial investment in developing platform should be built upon to allow reaping the full benefits of this initiative.

The hosting of the virtual platform is now secured (through SRC flexible resources) for the next three years. Also, SRC is devoting some financial resources to fund the partial efforts of the administrator of the virtual platform. This will keep virtual platform updated with some key pieces of news, resources, and allow space for future interactions.

The virtual platform was also open to evaluation and contributions from post-graduate students at the Institute of Global Health and Human Ecology at AUC (IGHHE/AUC). This was part of their graduation assignments. The suggestions received from these young scholars are being considered for further developing virtual platform.

For the future, SRC is finalizing an agreement, with School of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut within an IDRC grant, to support strengthening the Health Information Systems in the Arab region. The strengthening cover introducing indicators to capture both the equity and SDH lens, as well as collaborating with health programs implemented in the two countries of Morocco and Jordan. This agreement includes some financial resources to reflect the contributions of this collaborative effort in the SDG virtual platform. Also, the partnerships with Morocco and Jordan will be further built upon and consolidated within this new effort. Currently there are some discussion that may allow the launching of a second phase of the EMR-SDGs learning platform. This new phase is expected to include a new section on ‘Healthy Ageing’. This topic has currently received some seed funding towards capacity building and implementing a standardized international longitudinal survey (SRH). This activity is led by IGHHE/AUC in collaboration with SRC/AUC. Discussions are underway with Ministry of Health in Egypt to be the custodian of this study. Also, some preliminary discussion has been initiated with UNFPA/ASRO.

Another direction is to use the platform as a virtual space for training workshops and also for covering the SDG education and gender goals (as key SDH). Preliminary discussion with UNESCO has started.