Impact study of the SR MENA Project
This impact study has been developed to better understand the results of the SR MENA Project, conducted by ISO and seven of its national member organizations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region between the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2015.

The project aimed to promote social responsibility (SR) and sustainable development by using the standard ISO 26000, *Guidance on social responsibility*, as a tool towards this objective. Because of its focus on social responsibility in the MENA region, the project was given the designation “SR MENA Project”.

The emphasis of the project was on supporting pilot organizations in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia to strengthen social responsibility and sustainable development in their strategies, policies and practical operations, both internally and with regard to their stakeholders, the communities in which they operate and their business partners.

The project was financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in the amount of 2.47 million Swiss francs.

The impact study is not part of the SR MENA Project itself, was not planned at the outset and is based entirely on the review of relevant project documentation without any direct interaction with the project participants.

The document provides a summary of the findings. The full study is available from ISO.
All countries in the region have a great history and cultural heritage. They have outstanding natural and historical sites which are also renowned tourist attractions. Some of them possess significant natural resources and most of them have experienced sustained economic growth, even if it declined in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

However, all of them face severe challenges in terms of social, economic and environmental conditions. Their societies show significant inequalities of wealth, access to education and health care, as well as considerable unemployment, in particular among the younger population.

A further challenge is the widespread corruption that has a strong impact on the functioning of public institutions. In many of these countries, the combination of poverty, inequality, eroded confidence in political leadership and corruption led to the civil unrest that erupted between 2010 and 2012 in what is generally referred to as the “Arab Spring”.

This is compounded by severe environmental challenges, primarily in the form of general water scarcity, which is likely to be exacerbated by climate change. In the foreseeable future, climate change is expected to produce flooding in some areas (e.g. the Nile basin) and droughts in most areas, coupled with a significant reduction in agricultural yields.
Against this background, the SR MENA Project aimed to take practical steps that would contribute to building or strengthening a civil society and to assist key players in the region (government, business, civil society groups and others) in addressing some of the challenges described under the previous section.

To achieve this objective, selected organizations were trained to integrate social responsibility and sustainable development into their strategies, policies and operations and by supporting them through consultancy services provided by national and international experts.

Over 8000 staff members from 91 pilot organizations received training and consultancy to raise their understanding of social responsibility and qualify them to implement SR approaches. The organizations were, in turn, supported by 109 national experts who were specially trained in social responsibility issues throughout the project by international experts selected by ISO for this purpose.

The organizations concerned span a broad range of types and sizes, from NGOs involved in providing education to the most disadvantaged segments of the population, to small manufacturing companies, banks and public utility institutions (e.g. water, sewage and electricity plants), to luxury hotels, specialized hospitals and environmental protection agencies. Some of these organizations rely on public funding while others are privately owned and depend entirely on their own revenues.

In addition to supporting these organizations, public awareness events, training sessions and dialogue with political and government officials were initiated to increase knowledge about, and experience in, social responsibility in the various countries. These events were attended by over 4600 participants.

In some countries, in particular Egypt and Tunisia, the project seems to have had considerable influence on important national policies. This is evidenced by the fact that social responsibility principles and issues from ISO 26000 are referenced in Tunisia’s new Constitution and governance framework as well as in Egypt’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2030.

Details on how the project positively affected a subset of 91 organizations selected from the 115 that participated in the project (three from each of the seven countries) can be found in the full text of the impact study.
### Individuals trained in social responsibility issues and participation in awareness-raising events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th># of NEs</th>
<th># of participants in national training events</th>
<th># of POs</th>
<th># of participants in national awareness-raising events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>4,654</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NE = National experts  
PO = Pilot organizations
Individuals trained in SR issues

National experts were trained up to help pilot organizations introduce social responsibility and sustainable development practices into their operations. Other persons trained included the staff of pilot organizations and members from national standards bodies (NSBs). These activities had the following results:

- Training in SR issues helped develop their understanding of social responsibility and ISO 26000, the process of materiality determination, the importance of stakeholder engagement, the integration of social responsibility into the strategy of organizations and how to translate SR into organizational policies and practices.

- Many of these individuals are now in a position to promote the socially responsible behaviour of an organization as a key contributing factor to many aspects of sustainable development. They are also more knowledgeable about the relationships between ISO 26000 and other similar initiatives, such as the Global Reporting Initiative and the UN Global Compact, which allows them to rely on a wider network and take advantage of synergies.

- As such, they represent a valuable resource for institutions in their countries, including the NSBs, as they can be used as trainers, consultants and, more generally, as change agents to further disseminate knowledge and practices of social responsibility and sustainable development.
Pilot organizations trained in SR issues

An analysis of the activities of the pilot organizations shows that most have, to differing degrees, addressed all three of the main Subject Areas (SA) identified in the implementation of the project:

**SA 1**: Development of new / update of existing Strategy, policies, procedures

**SA 2**: Environmental performance

**SA 3**: Social and economic issues

Only in a few cases could no actions be identified from the available project documents. This can be ascribed to the fact that only limited actions were actually taken, or, at least in some cases, to the assumption that appropriate policies or measures already existed, with no need for further action.

In terms of depth and focus, one can conclude from the activities undertaken by the pilot organizations that a majority of initiatives occurred in the area of governance, strategy, policy and procedures. These took on various forms, such as developing or updating existing strategies and policies by incorporating social responsibility issues and by developing codes of conduct, codes of ethics, and mission, vision or value statements.

It can therefore be concluded that one of the main impacts of the SR MENA Project has been to **build awareness of social responsibility and sustainable development concepts**, and incorporate them into organizational governance, strategy and policy.

Although it was only possible to review the documentation for three organizations for each of the seven participating countries, i.e. 21 organizations, it is likely that the other 70 organizations (for a total of 91 taking part) taking part in the project have also incorporated social responsibility concepts in their governance and strategies. It is therefore justified to extrapolate that the **SR MENA Project had considerable impact in this area.**

There has also been a significant number of activities in the field of **environment**. In some cases they are closely associated with measurable indicators, showing notable resource savings. In many other cases, however, information is insufficient to assess the outcome and whether stringent monitoring was applied to ensure that environmental performance was reliably and continually measured.

Despite this caveat, from the information available, **it seems fair to assume that progress has been made in improving environmental performance**, an outcome that seems reasonable to extrapolate to all participating companies.

Of the three subject areas, **the ones that have shown the least progress are the social and economic areas**. Although there are examples of adjusting the rating and remuneration of employees, as well as providing training and continuous learning opportunities, it appears that more could be done in this field. This concerns, in particular, measures aimed at promoting a higher degree of gender equality.
Overview of the subject areas addressed by each of the pilot organizations.

**Algeria**
- CTTP
- NCA Rouiba
- SASACE

**Egypt**
- AUEED
- Cairo Chamber of Commerce
- Domina Coral Bay Hotel

**Iraq**
- State Company of Leather Industries
- Staff Development Center
- Sunni Waqf Directorate

**Jordan**
- Rangers
- Specialty Hospital
- Water Authority Jordan

**Lebanon**
- Al-Kawthar School
- Banque Libano-Francaise (BLF)
- Château Ksara

**Morocco**
- Amendis
- Cochepa
- Colorado

**Tunisia**
- Amen Bank
- SAIPH
- STEG

Subject areas addressed by the organization:
- **SA 1**: Strategy, policies, procedures
- **SA 2**: Environmental performance
- **SA 3**: Social and economic issues

[... Subject areas not addressed by the organization ...]
National standards bodies trained in SR issues

The function of an NSB in any given country is to operate standardization activities and facilitate processes that support standards development at various levels (national, international and, potentially, regional).

The NSBs of the countries covered by the project – and in particular their leadership – have acquired some knowledge of the concepts and practices of social responsibility. For the duration of the project, they had direct interaction with the pilot organizations, policy makers, as well as with the national experts. In addition, the NSB hosted national awareness raising events to promote SR.

In essence, this means that NSBs have increased their potential and ability to engage in future SR initiatives, which of course largely depends on the intensity of the cooperation of each individual NSB with companies in its country and whether it provides consultancy services and advisory support in the implementation of standards.

Another aspect to consider is whether an NSB is part of a network of organizations – including, for example, governmental and civil society organizations – which, together, could drive SR initiatives further in the form of good business practices, concepts of shared value, development of environmental protection initiatives and similar agendas.

Looking to the future, national experts and pilot organizations have a role to play in:

• Disseminating SR-related concepts and practices through their sphere of influence in relation to suppliers, customers, clients, etc.

• Providing practical examples for the implementation of SR in organizations of a certain sector (in this role, they can serve as a reference to other organizations of similar sectors for the further dissemination of SR in the country)

Individuals and organizations can also act beyond their immediate sphere of influence – through communication activities such as awareness-raising events in the country, press coverage, etc. – to help spread knowledge and increase the degree of awareness about SR in society.

Last but not least, in some countries, notably Egypt and Tunisia, the project seems to have had considerable impact on key national policies: SR principles and issues from ISO 26000 have been referenced in the new Constitution and in the new governance framework of Tunisia as well as in Egypt’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2030.
Key findings for the MENA region

A number of activities were undertaken during the SR MENA Project to raise awareness of the importance of social responsibility and sustainable development. Regional coordination meetings brought together representatives from the different countries participating in the project. However, the focus of the project’s activities was on the pilot organizations in each country, reducing the likelihood that strong linkages would have been created between organizations across different countries.

It seems therefore appropriate to consider regional impacts and benefits as a summation of the project’s national impacts on the different countries (i.e. on pilot organizations, their employees, national experts, NSBs, etc.), impacts which have been described in the previous section.

In summary, combining the outcomes at national level would indicate that the project, at the regional level, has contributed to:

- Training a significant number of national experts, who are now in a position to promote socially responsible behaviour of an organization. They represent a valuable resource in their countries, as they can be used as trainers, consultants and, more generally, as change agents to disseminate knowledge and practices of social responsibility and sustainable development
- Supporting a significant number of pilot organizations of various sizes operating in different sectors, to make progress in integrating social responsibility and more sustainable practices into their strategic, policy and business activities. Potentially, they can contribute directly to spreading social responsibility and sustainable business practices to partners, suppliers and communities interacting with them
- Increasing the NSBs’ knowledge of concepts and practices of social responsibility, potentially improving their ability to interact with stakeholders and decision makers and to engage in future SR initiatives.

The mere fact that ISO 26000 is being used in some countries as a reference for the new Constitution (Egypt), or for a national sustainable development strategy (Tunisia), is proof that, through the SR MENA Project, ISO 26000 had a wider effect on the region. Potentially, these examples can spread and be emulated in other countries.

It is also important to keep in mind that the project was significantly influenced by exogenous factors. Some of the countries involved had to face from the beginning of the project very difficult political and socio-economic situations (e.g. Iraq), whereas, for others, the domestic social and political volatility increased significantly as the project evolved, as a consequence of internal events (Tunisia, Egypt) or of developments in Syria (Jordan and Lebanon). Had these external events not occurred, the project outcomes would have likely been more significant.

The extent of external impacts in volatile conditions points to the importance of combining social responsibility and sustainable development with social and organizational resilience at the national or perhaps the regional level. This is particularly important given the severe impacts of climate change that the MENA region is expected to face in the coming decades.
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ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 162* national standards bodies. Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market-relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

ISO has published more than 21 000* International Standards and related documents covering almost every industry, from technology to food safety, to agriculture and healthcare.

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