1. Introduction

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“Standard development indicators failed to capture or predict the outburst of popular anger during the spring of 2011. What could explain this conundrum, which we refer to as the ‘Arab inequality puzzle’? Was economic inequality much higher than suggested by household expenditure data? Or were the grievances linked to factors other than economic inequality, such as decline in the overall quality of life, growing corruption, and lack of freedom, among others?”

(Ianchovichina, Mottaghi and Devarajan, 2015:11).

Countries of the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) have long traditions of formal and informal social welfare provision. These include mainstream programmes such as employment-based social insurance and targeted, non-contributory social assistance, as well as more culturally attuned programmes including marriage services, housing allowances and orphan sponsorship programmes. As elsewhere in the world, these social welfare programmes are not just systems of service delivery, but also reflect political, cultural and institutional orientations that have wider political significance for national identity and belonging, wealth redistribution and subjective perceptions of personal wellbeing. In other words, it is critical to go beyond a narrow technical emphasis on social welfare programmes and focus on social policy encompassing broad political and cultural signifiers. As noted by the veteran British sociologist and social reformer Peter Townsend (1975:6) “social policy is the underlying and professed rationale by which social institutions and groups are used or brought into being to ensure social preservation or development . . . all societies have social policies”.

Indeed, this is the core idea that forms the basis of this book: that the study of social policy in MENA countries offers a valuable but as yet under-used conceptual framework for linking macro-economic concerns and geopolitics to systems of governance and rule to final social welfare outcomes at the micro-level of citizens and residents. On the one hand, such a focus is of intrinsic value as it highlights issues of human rights and social welfare in the MENA countries. On the other, a social policy

perspective sheds new and essential light on our understanding of the causes of the major socio-political phenomena in the MENA region that occupy mainstream policy and academic analysts: namely, major security and political questions ranging from the 2011 Arab uprisings to the growth of Islamic social movements to the absence of accountable democracy in many Arab countries.

A 2015 World Bank report (Hassine, et al., 2015) analysing the reasons for the 2011 Arab uprisings makes clear why social policy matters for enhancing social cohesion and perceptions of social welfare. The report argues that it is the autocratic bargain of the MENA countries which is to blame: authoritarian political regimes in MENA have frustrated the life prospects of citizens and increased their sense of unfairness in not being able to access decent jobs and an adequate standard of living. According to the report, in the run-up to the 2011 uprisings, the major poverty and expenditure data relied upon by the global financial institutions indicated that the MENA countries were performing well: the ratio of expenditures of the bottom 40 per cent to the average was higher than all regions except Latin America and the Caribbean; MENA had reached the Millennium Development Goals related to poverty reduction and access to infrastructure services (especially drinking water and sanitation and internet connectivity); expenditure inequality, measured by the Gini index, had not worsened in most MENA economies in recent years and remained low to moderate by international standards.

It was in effect the worsening subjective perceptions that middle-class populations (“the middle 40 per cent”) in MENA had of their future quality of life that was the main trigger for the uprisings that took place (Hassine, et al., 2015:29). Quality of life encompassed a range of matters such as control of corruption and the quality of future jobs and public services, as well as political rights. These kinds of variables are not, however, accounted for in the traditional expenditure and consumption data (Hassine, et al., 2015). Data discussed in the report showed high dissatisfaction rates with housing, for example, among MENA populations.

Since the uprisings, the social situation of the MENA countries has worsened with conflict and continued migration. Some quick facts and figures help to highlight the urgent social consequences of the above trends. On average, the MENA region has the highest rate of unemployment in the world and poverty rates have remained largely unchanged for more than two decades (UNDP, 2014). What is especially noteworthy is that economic growth did not create new employment. Currently, unemployment is estimated to be 12 per cent in the region (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015) and female labour force participation stands at 21.6 per cent, which is the lowest in the world (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015).

The poverty headcount, using \$1.25 per day, is estimated at 2.2 per cent in the MENA region (Ianchovichina, Mottaghi and Devarajan, 2015:15). It is also well known that 53 per cent of MENA populations are estimated by the World Bank as living on under \$4/day, which confirms the high level of income precariousness in the region (Vishwanath and Serajuddin, 2012). Observers of the MENA context are also increasingly concerned by the links between poor economic performance and social conflict with inequality, and not least the high levels of youth unemployment in this region (Ncube, Anyanwu and Hausken, 2014).

Noteworthy too is the fact that the above situation is not commensurate with overall public expenditures or income per capita wealth in MENA countries, bearing in mind some of the world's highest-income countries are in the Arab Gulf region. For instance, the World Bank has highlighted how spending on food and fuel subsidies in MENA countries inflates their spending on social safety nets and accounts for the most significant discrepancy among countries' social expenditures (da Silva, et al., 2012), whereby "non-subsidy spending has a very narrow range: from 0.04 per cent of GDP in Kuwait to 1.9 per cent of GDP in Iraq". On the other hand, subsidy spending ranges widely, from 0.4 per cent of GDP in Lebanon to 13.7 per cent of GDP in the Republic of Yemen (da Silva, et al., 2012:110). Based on a sample of countries, da Silva et al. (2012:110) argued that "Subsidy spending in the region is much higher in both absolute and relative terms than other countries. The average Middle Eastern and North African country spends 5.7 per cent of GDP on food and fuel subsidies, as opposed to 1.3 per cent of GDP in the average benchmark country."

Thus, many of the MENA region's problems are "social" in nature and whilst the academic literature has been quicker to acknowledge the social welfare function of Islamic religious groups (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003; Heyneman, 2004), much less attention has been given to the role of other actors and institutions in social welfare provision, such as formal state provision, secular civil society groups and trade unions (Messkoub, 2006; Jawad, 2009). Hence, there are many reasons why a social policy analysis is relevant to the MENA region and they form the subject matter of this book. Nevertheless, this book does not appear in an academic vacuum.

It has been over a decade now since the first publications concerned with social welfare or social policy in MENA emerged: Moghadam and Karshenas (2006) and Jawad (2009). Though modest in number and written from a diversity of international development, political science and sociology perspectives, these texts offered a mosaic of historical and contemporary analyses of MENA social policies, often highlighting the

welfare mix and inadequate state coverage of populations. These studies are discussed in more depth in Chapter 2, which outlines the conceptual contributions of the present volume to the wider literature. What is useful to note in this introduction is that since the mid-2000s, there has been no systematic study of social policies in MENA countries, not least an effort to take account of the policy changes and social developments that have taken place.

It is also the case that in the last decade, the concept of social protection as a key pillar of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 agenda has begun to make its mark on policy debates in MENA: the region has begun to see movement in the shape of food and fuel subsidy reform in countries such as in Egypt, Jordan and Iran, the expansion of employment-based health insurance in the Arab Gulf states, the introduction of income tax in Jordan and the spread of cash transfers in conflict contexts, most notable in Lebanon and Jordan following the Syrian refugee crisis. International donor agencies have played a central role in expounding the social protection discourse in the MENA region, including MENA states making references to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) social protection floor in their national vision statements in the last decade. As such, social protection reforms seem to hold the key in terms of both addressing the social and economic grievances of MENA populations and the rising budget deficits of the Arab countries in particular. Moreover, it is evident that MENA is by no means a dormant region when it comes to the formulation of social policies, hence it is time to take stock of the key policy changes that have taken place since the appearance of the first major texts in this field of study in a manner that is both theoretically and empirically grounded.

In line with the aforementioned reference to policy change, the focus in this volume is on assessing the changing patterns of social policy coverage in MENA countries: what new discourses have emerged; what are their main political and social drivers and who are the key actors involved? Are there shifts in national and local governance that result from these changing policy discourses? Overall, do the changes of the last decade reflect broader or more selective social policy coverage? These are questions that address the structure and size of the social policy institutions (Korpi and Palme, 1998) of the MENA region, and as such they address a central debate in social policy studies pertaining to the tension between universal or targeted programmes. The post-2015 SDG agenda, as will be discussed in more detail below and in Chapter 2, is also noteworthy in its reference to the need for comprehensive social protection systems in all countries where no one is left out – as is the current keen interest by key donors such as the World Bank to reform social safety nets (2018).

This means that this volume takes a governance-oriented analysis that reflects long-standing traditions of social policy analysis based on the three types of state-oriented, market-oriented and populist-oriented approaches (Hall and Midgley, 2004), each of which highlights different logics for organizing access to social policies. In this sense, the present volume provides necessary conceptual and empirical groundwork for the next generation of more advanced studies that seek to evaluate the impact of the policy changes in MENA or classify the types of welfare systems that might exist in this region in line with the large body of Western literature in this regard (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi and Palme, 1998).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE BOOK

In line with the present focus on interrogating the policy changes and changing institutional structures underpinning social policies in the MENA region, this volume employs three heuristic concepts of *membership*, *allocation* and *entitlement* to critically examine the nature of the policy reforms that have taken place over the last decade in MENA. These three concepts support the orientation outlined so far in that they capture how policy change has followed distinct or intertwined state, market or populist paths towards social policy provision. Thus, the volume provides an in-depth discussion of a broad range of policy case studies that allow for comparison between MENA countries and the contemporary debates surrounding the relative feasibility and desirability of universal or targeted social protection programmes in the Global South (Deacon, 2013; Seekings, 2015; Martinez Franzoni and Sanchez-Ancochea, 2016). As such, the volume provides a much-needed and refreshed account of social policy change in MENA, following the landmark works on MENA social policy of the mid-2000s and the current active policy climate in relation to social protection.

Before we address the main research questions and objectives of this volume, it is helpful to clarify the use of the terms of social policy and social protection in the work at hand. These terms are not used interchangeably. As a field of applied policy and academic enquiry, social policy is firmly rooted in the Western European welfare state literature, which provided the conceptual foundations for various scholars in the early 2000s to begin to consider the welfare systems of countries in the Global South, including MENA (Gough and Wood, 2003; Moghadam and Karshenas, 2006; Jawad, 2009). The present book recognizes the boundaries of the subject to the extent that the academic study of social policy may be a unique feature of post-war capitalist democracies and the tension between capital and labour

in industrial and post-industrial settings. These boundaries are especially pertinent when no definitive classification of welfare state development in the MENA region yet exists. Nevertheless, as the aforementioned citation by Townsend (1975:6) and the new generation of social welfare studies in the Global South that emerged in the early 2000s remind us, non-OECD countries have social policies or at the very least social strategies in the case of MENA countries (Jawad, 2009).

Thus, this volume considers social policy as providing the overarching theoretical and empirical backdrop to the present discussion, against which the emergence and popularity of the concept of social protection serves only to amplify the salience of the mother-subject. In this sense, social protection is viewed here as a related, though relatively newer concept, which has gained prominence in international development policy circles owing to greater concern for rising income inequalities and a view of cash transfers as the instrument of choice in development interventions (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Holmes and Jones, 2013; von Gliszczynski, 2015; Molyneux et al., 2016, 2017). Yet, as Midgley and Piachaud (2013) remind us, social protection is intrinsically related to social policy, though it has come to symbolize more the targeted social safety net arm of social policy and, as such, discussion of social insurance systems and income redistribution have often been left out of the equation in the Global South.

It should not be forgotten, therefore, that the concept of social protection has also entailed a major policy swing in international development circles since the early 2000s towards a more favourable view of universal social protection provision (Deacon, 2013). As highlighted, this has been spurred in part by the spread of state-provided cash transfer programmes in Latin America and Africa, but also because major international development institutions now recognize the urgency of dealing with the social and economic challenges produced by intranational and international social inequalities. To this end, it is noteworthy that major policy actors such as the ILO and the World Bank have endorsed the adoption of universal social protection by all countries through a 2015 dual initiative called *A joint mission and plan of action: Universal social protection to ensure no one is left behind* (Zelenev, 2015). The reference to universal social protection marked a clear departure within development policy discourse from the conventional orthodoxy of social risk management and the ethos of targeted income support and means-tested basic social services. According to the joint mission document, universal social protection means “the integrated set of policies designed to ensure income security and support for all across the life cycle – paying particular attention to the poor and vulnerable” (Zelenev, 2015:840).

This was followed by the formal adoption of social protection systems as a means to poverty reduction in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, as can be seen in *Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere* and *Target 3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable*. At the time of writing, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s most recent World Outlook Report (2017) also emphasizes the importance of fiscal policy to address social inequalities.

Thus, social policy provides the broad conceptual framework for addressing issues of coverage and institutional reconfiguration in the MENA region to study the current social protection paradigm. This has grown in salience among MENA governments since the 2011 Arab uprisings, thanks to the steer of international donor agencies seeking to reform state budget deficits and address the widespread humanitarian crises arising out of Iraq, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere. In so doing, the approach taken in this book allows us to be sensitive to both the long-standing state and non-state social policy structures as well as the impact of conflict in MENA.

Hence, the key questions around which this volume is organized are:

- (1) What have been the major drivers of new social policy development in MENA over the last decade?
- (2) What new social policy instruments have taken root in MENA across both formal and informal state and societal institutions?
- (3) What scope is there for developing a more universal social policy approach in the MENA region, which can in turn promote solidarity and social – including gender – equality?

MAIN THEMES OF THE BOOK

The contributions in this book offer more than just a tried and tested analysis of the political and social problems that face MENA. In line with the overarching conceptual framework that foregrounds the discussion in Chapter 1, the contributions are agenda setting and forward looking, since they critically consider significant new social policy developments across the MENA region with the aim of highlighting the key discourses, actors and institutions that are shaping the current policy landscape. The chapters address fundamental concerns of social policy that are related to the effectiveness of provision, the efficiency of social expenditure and the extent of social inclusion. These are examined in relation to the entitlement of service-users to access services, but also the wider implications for social

and political membership to which entitlement leads (see the conceptual framework in Chapter 2).

As such, the discussions in this book range across a variety of policy sectors and social issues including social expenditure, social security and cash transfers; the challenges of demographic change and the social and political rights of vulnerable populations such as children, those with disabilities; the refugee crisis and the overlapping demands between humanitarianism and social protection in MENA; the long-standing role of religious welfare organizations in the region; and governance reforms such as in relation to social accountability in social policy provision. Together, these contributions highlight the most significant areas of social policy practice in MENA, in a manner attuned with social policy theoretical analysis. Questions of universalism and selectivity are central to all of the chapters and explored through a variety of lenses in relation to policy actors and modes of delivery.

The sequence of the chapters is organized to provide a broad conceptual introduction to the institutional and historical underpinnings of social policy provision in the MENA region. They highlight challenges and opportunities in relation to governance and shortcomings in coverage levels and generosity of social welfare benefits. In Chapter 2, Jawad, Jones and Messkoub review the current theoretical and policy landscapes that set out a conceptual framework for the book. Building on the twin social policy ideas of *membership* and *allocation*, they present a conceptual framework for analysing the social policy developments that are explored in this book. They add to these two core concepts, a bridging concept also deeply rooted in social policy analysis: *entitlement*. *Entitlement* reflects the rules or eligibility criteria by which *membership* of a community enables or prevents benefit from the *allocation* of wealth and resources. In essence, questions about membership, allocation and entitlement inevitably relate to the mutual responsibilities among state, societal and market actors in protecting against social risks and ensuring the social and individual welfare of their members.

Hence, the three core concepts deployed in the book help to build a clearer picture of the institutional orientation of MENA social policy systems: are these systems becoming more state, market or populist-oriented and, as such, what are the prospects for universal coverage? These are questions that have become ever more relevant in the MENA region and help to build connections between basic issues of human need, dignity and survival to the more conventional concerns of macroeconomic policy and political stability. As an example, it is no coincidence that the Syrian conflict and ensuing refugee crisis beginning in 2011 have been linked to unsustainable rural–urban migration and food insecurity.

In Chapter 3, Loewe examines how social protection systems have a triple function in the development process: a social one (to reduce inequality and poverty in all its dimensions), an economic one (to reduce the vulnerability of households and thereby encourage them to become economically active) and a political one (to strengthen social cohesion and the stability of society and polity). The chapter argues that social protection systems in MENA however, fail largely with respect to all three functions. Governments in the region spend considerable shares of GDP on social protection but the funds are typically used for inefficient and inequalitarian instruments. Most of them cover only parts of the population or provide different degrees of social security to different population groups, thereby replicating and intensifying the existing stratification of society. As a result, most schemes redistribute resources from the bottom up, rather than to the poor, and therefore have only limited effects on poverty. Finally, most schemes also suffer from significant deficits with regards to efficiency and sustainability.

Moving to Chapter 4, Ait Mansour and Jawad offer an institutional analysis in support of the above argument. Their chapter offers a critical mapping of patterns of social security and social assistance in North African countries in order to revisit long-standing debates in the wider MENA region on how to meet urgent basic needs, as well as protect human rights. The chapter discusses the tension between different approaches to social policy and the implications for programme design and implementation. To help the policy debate move forward, the chapter calls for a distinction to be made between small-scale targeted poverty relief programmes that fall under “social assistance” and larger social policy programmes, including social security policies, to which all citizens should be entitled – hence, the more universal arm of social policy. The discussion provides some historical context, setting out the main political and economic factors that have shaped social policy systems in North Africa. It then focuses in more detail on the challenges that social policy faces there, thereby showing how far-reaching and multidimensional the needs and social problems of the local populations are. The chapter shows that the social policy system continues to be dominated by social safety net and social assistance programmes. It reinforces the argument that social policy plays a key role in advancing social and economic development, which is not an approach that has been recognized in practice among North African governments.

The set of chapters that follow explore key policy trends and specific-country contexts that are currently occupying government and donor agency discourses. Selwaness and Messkoub (Chapter 5) explore what they argue is an urgent need to address the shortcomings of Egypt’s current social protection system as part of a new social contract between the state

and its citizens. With Egypt in a state of economic instability and recent efforts to reform the social insurance system stalled, the aim of this chapter is to provide a review of social insurance (SI) and social assistance (SA) systems, particularly in terms of coverage of population and benefits adequacy. The findings show that a large and increasing proportion of workers are without social security coverage. This is because of the expansion of informal employment reaching up to 75 per cent of private sector wage employment and around 85 per cent of non-wage employment. Such a shortfall of coverage is particularly pronounced among young workers aged 20–29, younger-headed households and workers in rural areas. The economically vulnerable workers, who are the largest proportion of all workers and are in the lower wealth quintiles of population, are less likely to be enrolled in the social security system and will not receive any pension in their old age. This SI coverage gap is combined with the failure of SA programmes to reach a large percentage of the poor. The SA benefits to the poor also suffer from an adequacy problem where, in 2012, the average social assistance income represented around 6.6 per cent of the “very poor” and 4.4 per cent of the “poor” poverty line. While there have been some reform measures to increase pensions, the inflationary wave hitting the Egyptian economy would erode SA pensions and raise headcount poverty rate. These challenges have called into question the efficacy of the current social protection system and the state’s ability to provide for its citizens’ basic welfare. A comprehensive reform of the social protection system in support of the poor and vulnerable should remain at the top of Egypt’s policy agenda.

In Chapter 6, Messkoub discusses cash transfers (CT) in Iran. Whether they are considered as income support to the elderly, poor households or other vulnerable groups, CTs have been hailed as one of the most innovative and effective social policy initiatives in the developing world. Available evidence suggest that their success would depend on their financial sustainability, low inflation and maintenance of a broad social policy support in areas such as nutrition, health, education and housing. It is against this international experience and evidence that the chapter sets out to assess the Iranian CT programme that was introduced by President Ahmadi-Nejad as part of a major liberalization of energy prices in 2010 in order to bring domestic prices of energy (petrol, diesel and gas) and public utilities (water and electricity) in line with international levels. The Iranian CT programme became one of the largest of its kind in the world, with 90 per cent of the population covered and costing 10 per cent of GDP in 2010, without any monitoring and evaluation institutions. This is in contrast to the CT programmes of Brazil and Mexico that cover about a quarter of the population at 0.4 per cent of GDP with regular monitoring

and evaluation. In its early years the Iranian CT made a notable contribution to the welfare of those in the bottom income deciles of the population and lowered absolute and relative poverty. These early gains have gradually been eroded by inflation. The chapter argues that Iran's CT programme has to be complemented with other supportive social policy measures in the areas of health, nutrition, education and housing if it is to achieve its anti-poverty aims and improve human capabilities of those on low incomes.

Abu-Hamad and Jones and colleagues (Chapter 7) consider the rise of the social protection discourse and how this is increasingly seen as essential not just in tackling risk and vulnerability but also in promoting broader social inclusion and social justice. To this end, analysts have begun to pay greater attention to the ways in which social protection programmes can help mitigate the specific risks faced by distinct populations – such as women, children and older people – and ensure their entitlements to a basic standard of wellbeing. The ways in which social protection programming can contribute to social justice for people with disabilities have, however, been relatively neglected, with the needs of children with disabilities almost invisible. Addressing this lacuna, this chapter draws on two rounds of mixed-methods research undertaken in 2013–14 and in 2015–16 in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. It examines the impact of the Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme – a large-scale social assistance programme – through the lens of children with disabilities. The chapter concludes that the poverty-targeting approach used by the programme is too narrow and suggests important entry points that could help this flagship programme become more responsive to the complex and interlinked vulnerabilities facing children with disabilities and their caregivers – and more effectively promote social rights and social justice for all citizens, including the hardest to reach.

In Chapter 8 Azoh Barry and Jawad initiate the discussion on the Syrian refugee crisis in MENA. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the issues facing social policy and social protection in MENA countries that are dealing with conflict and refugee crises. The prolonged armed conflict in Syria raises significant long- and short-term challenges for social justice and social welfare in relation to refugees arriving in other MENA countries. These two sets of issues are compounded in a conflict-ridden region like MENA, making it incumbent upon international humanitarian agencies to consider new approaches to their activities that link their relief services to more long-term social protection provision. The chapter focuses mainly on the situation of Syrian child refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, with some reference to Turkey. It addresses the challenges of transitioning from emergency relief to social

protection for both national and international actors alike, and more specifically, whether national social policy frameworks in host countries can be made more proactive in humanitarian relief contexts. In so doing, the chapter reflects upon the “New Way of Working” approach and evaluates the extent to which states can adequately accommodate the humanitarian and welfare needs of Syrian child refugees when weak state capacities and pre-existing social and economic hardship among the resident populations already pose historic barriers to social policy. As such, this chapter is of relevance to the current support for social safety nets and Adaptive Social Protection measures by international donor agencies (World Bank, 2018).

In Chapter 9, Abu-Hamad and Jones and colleagues offer a subsequent contribution on the refugee crisis, focused on cash transfer programming. The 1.3 million Syrians living in Jordan face a highly uncertain future. They are unable to return home due to the unabated conflict in Syria and have very restricted employment options in Jordan. With savings and assets often depleted, and borrowing options largely limited to family and neighbours, UN social assistance (cash transfers and food vouchers) is frequently all that prevents tens of thousands of refugee families from descending into destitution. However, this assistance is increasingly jeopardized by budget cuts and donor fatigue. This chapter draws on primary mixed methods research carried out in 2016 and 2017 aimed at assessing the effects of the two cash assistance programmes available to Syrian refugees living in Jordan – one provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and another provided, to families with children, by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The chapter explores the potential and limitations of existing assistance modalities to tackle refugee families’ complex economic and social vulnerabilities, drawing on a transformative social protection framework. The chapter concludes that refugees’ needs extend beyond the material; with their livelihoods and social networks disrupted, and violence and fear too often a feature of their lives as refugees in host communities, cash alone cannot adequately address their protection and psychosocial vulnerabilities. In humanitarian contexts, such as the Syrian crisis, a more transformative cash-plus approach is required for both adults and children.

The contribution by Aljabiri and Jawad (Chapter 10) revisits the topical interest in Islamic social welfare and highlights the salience of populist approaches to social policy which it espouses. The chapter offers a novel insight into the new political settlement that is emerging in Iraq after the demise of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003 through the lens of social welfare and social protection. Its main argument is that the Iraqi experience shows that Muslim Shi’a NGOs are playing an important role in the development of the new political order of Iraq, whereby social welfare

and social protection services remain intrinsic to their identity as political actors. The Iraqi experience is compared to other similar contexts such as Lebanon in the chapter. The chapter maps out the role of Shi'a NGOs in Iraq as social protection providers. It critically examines how they are engaged in protecting and mobilizing the Shi'a denomination, through provision of social welfare services and consolidating the role of the Shi'a-led government. To this end, Shi'a welfare NGOs in Iraq favour charity and social assistance-based services that draw upon their religious identity and hence promote an understanding of Iraqi citizenship that is rooted in Shi'a or sectarian identity. This chapter also addresses a wider issue about the role of religious groups in social policy systems and asks which actors are to be involved in social protection in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

In Chapter 11, Bergh explores a new area of policy reform and hence takes the book back to the overarching concern with the dynamics of social policy analysis in MENA. Here, questions of universalism and selectivity are central. Using examples from cash transfer programmes and Community Score Card processes in the education and health sectors, this chapter explores the theoretical and empirical linkages between social accountability, citizenship, and social protection in the MENA region. Social accountability initiatives are considered to have the potential to empower citizens in holding service providers to account, and by raising their awareness of their social rights, contribute to the emergence of “social citizenship” or even to a new social contract in the region. Many domestic and external actors have thus started to include accountability mechanisms in social protection programmes such as cash transfers and education and health provision for vulnerable groups. The available evidence reviewed here highlights the constraints for social accountability to come about in such programmes, such as information asymmetries, fear of sanctions when raising grievances, and the (at times) negative role played by social workers, who are often key actors in mediating the state–society divide. A review of the work by CARE International in the area of Community Score Cards shows, however, that they can lead to positive instrumental, relational (empowerment), and even systemic (institutional) changes, especially when certain contextual factors are in place, such as access to information rights. Given the frequent reluctance of service providers to get involved in such processes, there is nevertheless a risk that a rights discourse is toned down and citizen and civil society participation in service delivery is promoted instead, thereby letting the state “off the hook”. The key challenge is thus to ensure the “political salience” of service provision for state officials without further entrenching co-optation and patronage systems, and to institutionalize transparent and credible public interfaces

between states and citizens in which mutual accountability relations can be fostered.

The concluding chapter offers a synthesis of the key findings of this volume and sets the agenda for future research on social policy in the MENA region. It will be clear from this conclusion that neglect of inclusive and coherent social policy or misuse of its remit by political authorities to support partisan political goals accounts in large part for the social and political turmoil currently engulfing the MENA region. In addition, it is impossible to understand the historical and political salience of religious (and Islamic) welfare activity in MENA without the benefit of the wider social policy lens that this book offers. Most importantly, as latecomers to debates on social protection, MENA countries are on the cusp of major social policy reforms in the wake of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda that will set the stage for the next decade of social policy interventions. It is hoped, therefore, that this volume will support evidence-based policy discussion at a time when concerns over budget deficits and social instability may yet again force the hand of fragile state structures in MENA.

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