



The state of human development in the Arab region

This chapter starts with a brief discussion of the paucity of data and information on human development in the region and the challenges these gaps pose. It then summarizes the status of core human-development measures for the region compared to those for other regions of the world and over time, based primarily on the HDI. The chapter introduces three deficits that are considered to be defining features of Arab countries that impede human development. As an additional yardstick for judging the importance of some of the themes discussed in subsequent chapters, it reports on the findings of a limited survey of the opinions of young Arabs on major issues. On the basis of these various analyses, the conclusion is reached that the region is at a decisive crossroads. Some of the key challenges that the region faces are then identified.

PRELIMINARY NOTE: DATA DEFICIENCIES

The Arab region suffers from a severe shortage of detailed data and information necessary to undertake a comprehensive examination of human development, especially but not only with respect to the dimensions of institutional context and knowledge acquisition. The inadequacy of reliable, comparative and recent data from Arab sources makes it necessary at times to use international data sources. These sources can present problems. They sometimes resort to estimation to arrive at region-wide indicators where corresponding data for individual countries within those regions are not available. Another difficulty is that various international organizations classify Arab countries differently, making consistent comparisons across these classifications difficult.

The limited production and dissemination of data and information by many developing

countries, including Arab countries, are unfortunate but not surprising. They reflect some of the consequences of underdevelopment, including suboptimal governmental capacity and decision-making processes, which weaken demand for data and information, in turn retarding their production and dissemination.

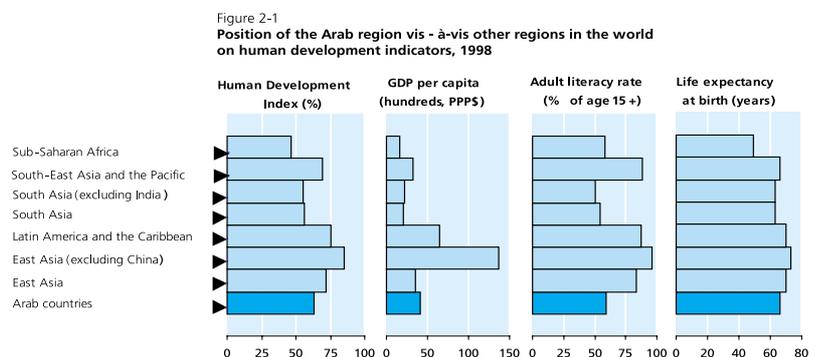
This Report presents as solid an assessment of the state of human development in Arab countries as can be supported by the current information base. Nevertheless, the relative fragility of the data and information base means that caution is needed in drawing conclusions from it. The Report has endeavoured to exercise due caution in this respect, and readers are invited to do likewise.

BASIC MEASURES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: REGIONAL COMPARISONS

This section briefly compares Arab countries as a group with other world regions with respect to the UNDP HDI and three of its four component indicators.

As can be seen from figure 2.1, the Arab region outperformed sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia on the overall HDI and on indicators of overall health (life expectancy at birth) and educational attainment (proxied here by adult literacy). It has yet to reach the levels attained by East Asia (with or without China)

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and Latin America and the Caribbean for these indicators. Evidently, it is the latter comparison, i.e., with regions that have done better, that matters in any discussion of enhancing human development in the Arab region. Comparing the region with those that have done less well could invite undesirable self-congratulation in the face of major challenges.

The relative position of the Arab region improves with respect to the per capita output indicator (PPP basis), where it outperformed the South-East Asia and the Pacific region as well as South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The Arab region might thus be said to be richer than it is developed with respect to basic human-development indicators.

Since a strong association exists at the global level between per capita output and the HDI, the above data could indicate that Arab countries may have invested more in building physical capital than in developing human resources. This in turn suggests the great scope for future investment by Arab countries in the formation of human capital, a major cornerstone of human development.

BASIC MEASURES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: REGIONAL COMPARISONS OVER TIME

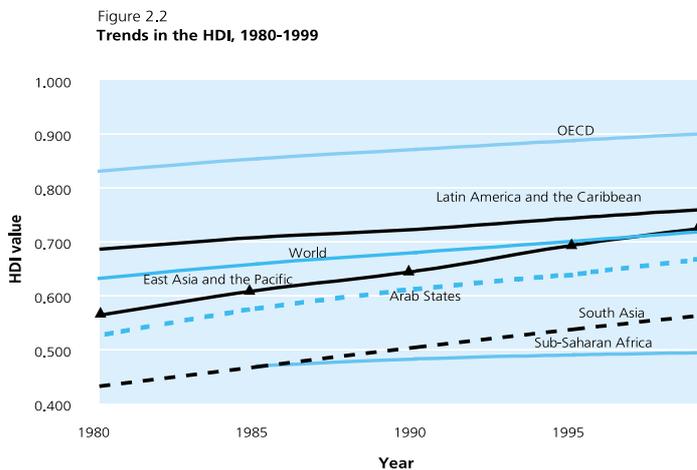
This section briefly compares the Arab countries as a group with other world regions in terms of trends in the HDI over time (figure 2.2).¹ The HDI value for the Arab region was

lower than the global average throughout the period from 1980 to 1999. Over time, the region again did better than sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It also narrowed the gap with Latin American and Caribbean countries—but the gap remains. The East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) region showed the most rapid gains. Although the Arab region matched the EAP rate of improvement in HDI values in the 1980s, it fell slightly further behind in the 1990s.

DIFFERENCES IN THE ARAB REGION

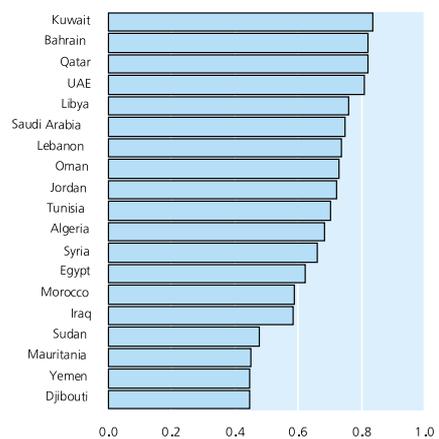
Arab countries present a very heterogeneous picture with respect to the HDI. Of the 19 countries for which 1998 values are available (UNDP, 2000) (data were unavailable for the occupied Palestinian territory and Somalia), four large-scale oil exporters are classified as "high human-development" countries. Four other countries are included in the "low human-development" group. Somalia (for which values could not be calculated) should also be considered in this group. (These latter five countries account for about one fifth of the total Arab population.) The remaining 11 Arab countries fall into the "medium human-development" category.

To further illustrate this heterogeneity, the highest-ranking Arab country on the HDI (Kuwait) scored only slightly lower than the world leader (Canada). At the other extreme, the lowest-scoring Arab country on this yard-



¹ Regional averages were computed, weighted by population size, based on data derived from HDR 2001. The calculations included only those countries that have data for the entire period and only those regions where over two thirds of the regional population are represented. HDI values were available for seven Arab countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia.

Figure 2-3¹
HDI values, Arab countries, 1998



Source: UNDP, 2000.

stick, Djibouti, is not much better off than the country with the world's lowest HDI value (Sierra Leone). In other words, the range of disparity among Arab countries on the HDI (figure 2.3) is almost as wide as that observed in the entire world.

THE THREE DEFICITS

As suggested in chapter 1 and as subsequent chapters will illustrate, human development in the Arab region needs to be assessed against a wider set of measures than GDP or those of the HDI. Scrutiny of Arab socio-economic systems from the perspective of Human Development in its broader sense encompassing freedom and human rights, shows that the region is hampered by three key deficits that can be considered defining features:

- the freedom deficit;
- the women's empowerment deficit;
- the human capabilities/knowledge deficit relative to income.

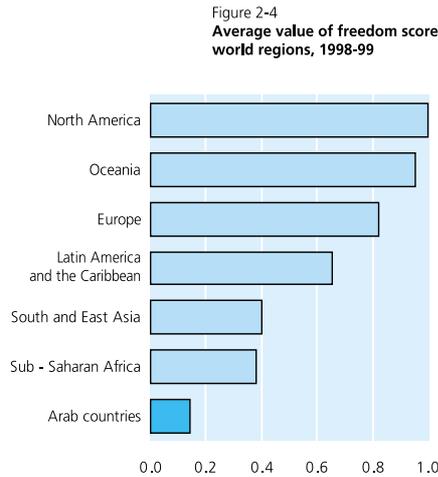
Each of these deficits is discussed in detail below.

THE FREEDOM DEFICIT

If human development is indeed freedom, as discussed in chapter 1, the measurement of freedom should be of paramount concern in the analysis of development. However, freedom is a concept that has been notoriously intractable to measurement, and it is widely felt that the prevailing basis for assessments of such difficult-to-quantify phenomena as freedom smacks of bias and a lack of rigour. However, the inextricable links between freedom and human development make it necessary to try to quantify the presence or absence of freedom in the context of the present Report. One way to do so is to look at a set of aspects of civil and political freedoms. Of course, human freedom encompasses much more than political freedom. However, since civil and political freedoms are considered among the most important instrumental freedoms, what follows focuses on these dimensions of freedom, using the freedom index to characterize the extent of freedom in Arab countries compared to other regions in the

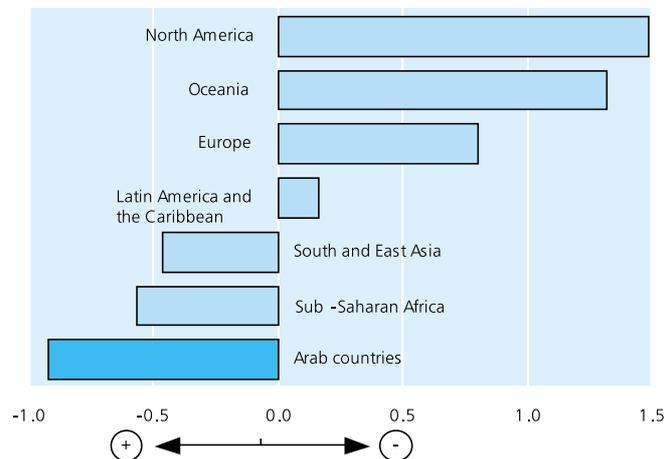
world, and among Arab countries themselves. At this level of aggregate analysis, this approach would seem to be acceptable if inevitably incomplete.

Out of seven world regions, the Arab countries had the lowest freedom score in the late 1990s (figure 2.4).



The low level of freedom in the Arab region is confirmed by a set of indicators of "voice and accountability" derived from another international database (Kaufman et al, 1999b). This set includes a number of indicators measuring various aspects of the political process, civil liberties, political rights and independence of the media. As figure 2.5 shows, the Arab region also has the lowest value of all regions of the world for voice and accountability.

Figure 2-5
Average value of "voice and accountability" indicators, world regions, 1998



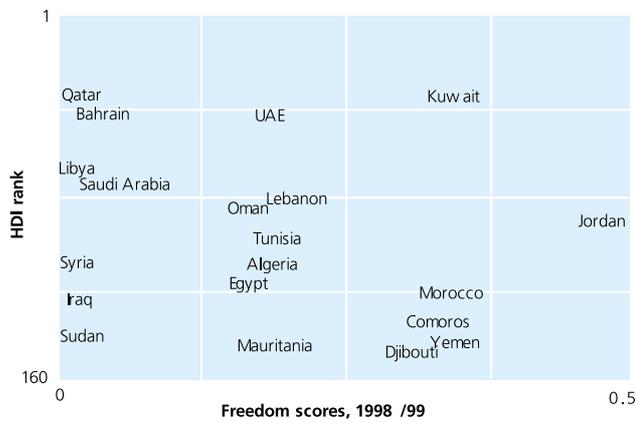
Source: A. A. Ali, background paper for the AHDR.

More telling still is figure 2.6, which shows that freedom scores for individual Arab coun-

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Figure 2-6
HDI ranks and freedom scores, Arab countries, 1998



tries do not tally at all with their standing on the HDI. (If they did, country symbols in the graph would have been concentrated on the diagonal connecting the lower left and upper right corners.) Countries with essentially the same HDI value can vary tremendously in their freedom scores.

THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT DEFICIT

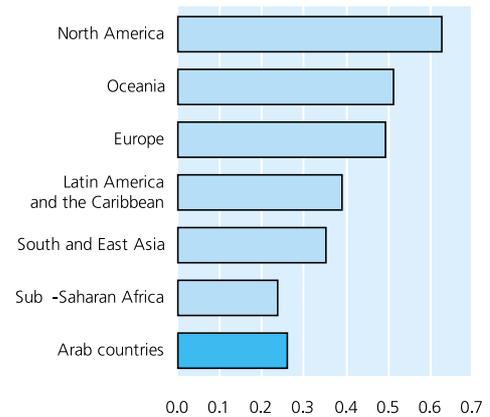
As noted in chapter 1, gender empowerment is a critical aspect of human freedom. Applying the UNDP gender empowerment measure (GEM)² to Arab countries clearly reveals that the latter suffer a glaring deficit in women's empowerment. Among regions of the world, the Arab region ranks next to last as measured by GEM; only sub-Saharan Africa has a lower score.

It should be noted that Arab countries have scored important successes in girls' education although the share of girls in enrolment is still relatively low, especially in higher education, as shown elsewhere in this Report. The main reason for the low GEM values of Arab countries is the limited participation of women in political organizations, as noted in chapter 7.

As with freedom, the next stage of analysis is to see how women's empowerment in individual Arab countries as measured by the GEM relates to their country's HDI position. It is worth noting that UNDP was able to cal-

culate 1995 GEM values for only 14 Arab countries because the necessary data were not available in many Arab countries. This fact itself reflects an apparent limited concern for women's empowerment in the region.

Figure 2-7
Average GEM values, world regions, 1995



Source: data derived from HDR 1995. Regional averages are weighted by population size.

For the Arab countries with GEM values (figure 2.8), no clear association is observed between the HDI and GEM. As with the freedom index, there is no correlation between the extent of gender empowerment in Arab countries and human development as measured by the HDI.

Arab countries clearly suffer a glaring deficit in women's empowerment.

Figure 2-8
HDI rank and GEM values, Arab countries



² The GEM measures the participation of women in economic, professional and political activities using the indicators of income per capita (PPP\$), women's percentage share of professional and technical positions, and women's percentage share of parliamentary seats, respectively.

Human capabilities in the region are relatively weak and poorly utilized, as subsequent chapters will show. A subsidiary deficit in human capabilities is revealed by better results in the area of health than in educational attainment in Arab countries. This is evident from figure 2.1, which indicates that, compared to high-ranking HDI regions, the Arab region suffers smaller shortfalls for the overall health indicator used in HDI (life expectancy at birth) than for educational attainment (proxied, in figure 2.1, by adult literacy). In an age of knowledge intensity, poor knowledge acquisition, let alone its production, is a serious shortfall. A telling indicator of the poor level of educational attainment in the Arab countries is the persistence of illiteracy rates that are higher, and educational enrolment rates that are lower, than those of dynamic less developed countries in East Asia and Latin America.

This shortfall underlies the emphasis that this Report places on building and using human capabilities, markedly in relation to knowledge acquisition. One proxy for access to knowledge in this age of connectivity is the number of Internet hosts per 1,000 people. The Arab region has the lowest level of access to ICT of all regions of the world, even lower than sub-Saharan Africa (figure 2.9). Moreover, all Arab countries except for Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates seem to be equal in their ICT poverty, irrespective of their HDI level (figure 2.10).

THE VOICES OF YOUTH

A more subjective but illuminating yardstick for the state of human development is represented by an effort to measure the concerns of youth, appropriate in a report dedicated to coming generations.

A standardized opinion poll of Arab youth was conducted under the sponsorship of UNDP country offices. The poll was originally meant to cover a limited number (24) of young Arabs (15 to 20 years of age) in each Member State of the Arab League.

In each country, the sample was to be divided equally between the sexes and roughly

Figure 2-9
Internet hosts (per 1,000 population), world regions, 1998

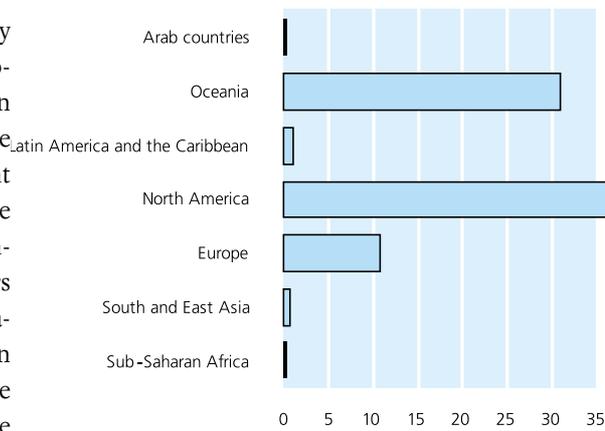


Figure 2-10
HDI rank and GEM values, Arab countries



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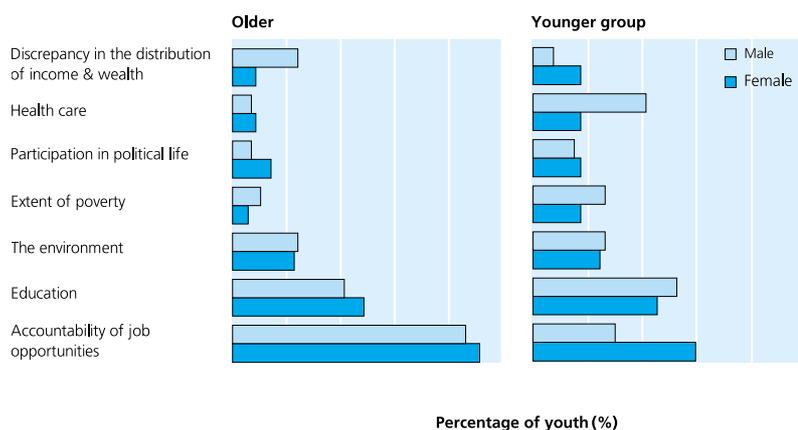
representative of three levels of socio-economic status (above average, average, below average). Responses from only five Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and United Arab Emirates) were available at the time of writing. However, the views of young Saudis became available through a published source (Yamani, M., in Arabic, 2001).

The questionnaire was also distributed at the 21st Arab Children's Conference held in Amman, Jordan from 10 to 17 July 2001, an event organized by the Performing Arts Centre of the Noor al-Hussein Foundation, with backing from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Organizers of the conference allowed the lead author of the Report to speak to the participants, ages 13 to 17, and obtain their responses to the questionnaire. Thus, 112 additional questionnaires, representing youths from 14 Arab countries,

were completed. However, the new sample increases the relative representation of young Jordanians since the conference was held in Amman. It also includes individuals who are younger than the sample for which the questionnaire was originally intended.

In the following analysis (figure 2.11), the responses of younger and older groups are considered separately to see if there are differences in their views.

Figure 2-11
Key issues for young Arabs



RESULTS OF THE OPINION POLL

An analysis of what the older group considered to be the most important issues among the topics considered in the Report indicates the following priorities: first, job opportunities (45 per cent of the respondents), followed by education (23 per cent), the environment (12 per cent), distribution of income and wealth (8 per cent), political participation (5 per cent), health care (4 per cent) and poverty (4 per cent). Young women expressed relatively more concern than did young men about education, work, political participation and health care.

Among the younger group, education (at 25 per cent) tops the list of concerns, followed by jobs (23 per cent), health care (15 per cent), the environment (13 per cent), poverty (11 per cent), political participation (8 per cent) and distribution of income and wealth (6 per cent).

It is noteworthy that the younger group expressed keener interest in health care, poverty and political participation, which indicates social sensitivity and early maturity among this group. Younger females expressed relatively higher concern than younger males

about work availability and the distribution of income and wealth.

Overall, the poll clearly suggests that job availability is the most common concern of youth, followed by education. The youth of individual countries expressed concern over other problems, including drugs and inadequate health care, reliance on foreign labour and job squeezes in labour markets where expatriate and national workers compete.

Remarkably, 51 per cent of older youths expressed a desire to emigrate to other countries, clearly indicating their dissatisfaction with current conditions and future prospects in their home countries.

Among those contemplating emigration, European countries were the favourite destination (46 per cent of respondents, 21 per cent of whom chose the United Kingdom alone), followed by the United States and Canada (36 per cent), and other Arab countries (13 per cent). The implicit judgement of how liveable these young people consider Arab societies to be is evident.

The younger group expressed slightly less of a desire to emigrate, with 45 per cent indicating their wish to do so. Young women showed less desire to leave their countries than young men did. With respect to the emigration destination, the younger group differed from the older one, with North America and other Arab countries being chosen more often (45 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively) and Europe less frequently although it was still the choice of a substantial percentage (32 per cent).

In general, the younger youths, particularly girls, seem to be somewhat more attached to their countries and aware of broad social issues such as participation and poverty. The expressed priorities of young people for education, together with the influence that education can have on the thinking of young people provide a strong reason to focus, as this Report does, on education systems in Arab countries.

Clearly, the responses obtained and analysed here do not constitute a probability sample of Arab youth large enough to permit valid generalizations about the entire universe of young Arabs. The aim of the poll was, within the limitations imposed by time and fi-

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nances, to obtain qualitative responses from purposive samples of Arab youth. Despite the small number of young people polled (240, including 128 in the five Arab countries and 112 at the Arab Children's Conference), of whom 53 per cent are girls, respondents had definite views on a wide spectrum of issues and expressed deep-seated concerns about, and a strong desire for, a better future. Their voices speak to many of the central issues examined elsewhere in this Report.

THE ARAB REGION AT A CROSSROADS

The conclusion from the preceding sections is that a broader approach to the concept of human development suggests that it is perhaps premature to celebrate the achievements of Arab countries as measured by the standard HDI. As this chapter has suggested, there are significant deficits in Arab countries with respect to key elements of human well-being: civil and political freedoms, the status of women in society and access to knowledge.

Indeed, as the world moves into the twenty-first century, the Arab world is at a crossroads. There are huge inter-country disparities in the region. While some countries have done well in terms of income and material wealth, human development remains low in many instances. Poverty and deprivation in their many forms remain real in many Arab societies. In some instances, as in the case of the occupied Palestinian territory, the level and degree of human deprivation under occupation reaches extreme levels. Hanan Ashrawi in her individual contribution to this Report (box 2.1) speaks to this issue :

Continued occupation of Arab territories, the political instability that ensues and poor governance in the region place major obstacles in the way of human development, particularly with respect to the non-material aspects of human well-being.

Beyond the question of occupation, millions have lost lives and livelihoods because of conflict driven by regional and extra-regional factors. Furthermore, in a vicious circle of cause and effect, conflict has both led to, and

resulted from, enormous resources being directed to the acquisition and development of arms and armies.

Political upheavals, military conflicts, sanctions and embargoes have affected many economies of the region, causing declines in productivity, disrupting markets and retarding human development. This latter impact is starkly manifested in the condition of children in Iraq, who more than any other group bear the brunt of human development under siege (box 2.2). Some countries struggling to recover from the ravages of war have emerged with substantial debts, limiting options for public expenditure. All affected countries have emerged with compounded socio-political problems that have retarded progressive moves towards liberalization and democratization.

The region's development prospects cannot significantly improve unless a dynamic process of vigorous human development is initiated and maintained. The severe consequences of a continuation of present trends means that all Arabs need to make inescapable strategic choices. These choices need to be faced directly and urgently.

The fundamental choice is whether the region's trajectory in history will remain characterized by inertia, including the persistence of institutional structures and types of actions that have produced the substantial development challenges it currently faces, or whether prospects will emerge for an Arab renaissance that will build a prosperous future for all Arabs, especially coming generations. The Arab responses to a number of derived challenges will jointly determine which of those two historical trajectories the Arab region will follow:

- First, the choice between continuation of dependency on societies that are leaders in the production of knowledge--and building a capacity to belong, from a position of strength, to the global knowledge society by establishing an effective, dynamic knowledge-acquisition system. This is one of the main keys to progress in the Arab world. There is an increasing need to strive to overcome backwardness in the area of knowledge acquisition and

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Human development: the Palestinian perspective A special contribution

Cast outside the course of history, deprived of the most basic rights and requirements for a life of dignity and freedom — let alone for sustainable human development — the people of Palestine are made to endure all forms of exclusion, oppression, and exploitation.

The dual injustices of dispossession, dispersion and exile on the one hand and of occupation and enslavement on the other have rendered the Palestinians entirely vulnerable to all manner of denial and victimization.

Deprived of the right to life, land, and even historical affirmation by Israel's relentless attempts to negate Palestinian sovereignty, national identity and continuity, the Palestinian people have been engaged in the dual process of nation-building and peace-making as an act of will and as a force of human redemption.

Simultaneously engaged in the struggle for survival and liberation, we are committed to those values and endeavours that render life meaningful and imbue it with value. Traditional indicators and gauges, however, fall far short of encompassing or even adequately assessing the full scope and complexity of the challenges that confront us.

Ensuring a human-based and inclusive system of governance, generating equitable systems for economic growth and social justice, combating poverty and preventing regression in education and health standards, empowering women and children and other vulnerable sectors of society, while legislating for a constitutional democracy that would guarantee justice and the rule of law have all become integral components of our survival strategies.

The tenacious pursuit and proclamation of our human-development agenda are rapidly being overpowered by the deafening din of the occupation's military onslaughts. Imprisoned on our own lands by a multiple, and suffocating, state of siege, our homes and institutions are being shelled and bombed on a

daily basis, our activists and leaders assassinated, while innocent children and adults are murdered in cold blood. Prevented from laying claim to our resources and rights, we witness our lands being confiscated and our crops and trees destroyed. Israeli military checkpoints fragment our human and territorial continuity and have become the most brutal expression of a discriminatory and pervasive system of wilful humiliation and subjugation. All rights--including the right to shelter; to educational and health services; to work; to a clean and untainted environment; to a life free from war, fear and coercion; to governance as an expression of the collective will for internal justice and to gain access to the tools of information and knowledge--have been obliterated.

No instruments have been devised to measure such wholesale destruction. A quantitative approach may be possible for the assessment of the number of hectares confiscated, trees uprooted, victims murdered or injured, jobs lost and income severed. However, the human mind has not succeeded in measuring the full import of the loss of hope and the usurpation of the future of a whole nation. Nor can the collective and individual traumas of children in the grip of horror and fear be quantified — despite the frequency of nightmares, bedwetting incidents, and uncontrollable behaviour.

The poverty level that defies any measure is the poverty of spirit and its concomitant moral bankruptcy that are the essence of the occupation. The impunity it enjoys before a global rule of law and its immunity to intervention and accountability exact a heavy toll on the measure of humanity as a whole. Such devaluation — at once of Palestinian human rights and lives and of Israeli culpability and moral responsibility — is also immeasurable. The courage to intervene, rectify and redress such a comprehensive exercise of cruelty and violation remains beyond value.

Hanan Ashrawi

A related strategic choice is between preserving the present institutional context that has proved unfavourable to development and moving to build an institutional structure that supports a social contract enabling human development.

to put knowledge to work effectively in Arab societies. At the beginning of the third millennium, knowledge acquisition through education/learning and research and development and its effective use are of crucial importance to the Arab world, whether with respect to their impact on good governance, on ensuring good health or on providing other prerequisites for material and moral well-being.

A related strategic choice is between preserving the present institutional context that has proved unfavourable to development and moving to build an institutional structure that supports a social contract enabling human development.

- Second, the choice between continuing to face the challenges of the region, the world and the new century individually and remain weak and marginal—and constructing institutional arrangements that can transform the huge potential of Arab integration into a reality. All human societies, including the most advanced, strive to belong to larger entities able to compete in a globalized world characterized by intense competition. This leads directly to the third challenge.
- Third, a choice between remaining on the margins of the modern world—and developing a new societal capacity, on both the national and pan-Arab levels, sufficient to ensure not

BOX 2.2:

Children in Iraq: human development under siege

"The increase in mortality reported in public hospitals for children under five years of age (an excess of some 40,000 deaths yearly compared with 1989) is mainly due to diarrhoea, pneumonia and malnutrition. In those over five years of age, the increase (an excess of some 50,000 deaths yearly compared with 1989) is associated with heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, liver or kidney diseases."

"Malnutrition was not a public health problem in Iraq prior to the embargo. Its extent became apparent during 1991 and the prevalence has increased greatly since then: 18% in 1991 to 31% in 1996 of [children] under five with chronic malnutrition (stunting); 9% to 26% with underweight malnutrition; 3% to 11% with wasting (acute malnutrition), an increase of over 200%. By 1997, it was estimated

about one million children under five were [chronically] malnourished."

"The situation throughout Iraq remains one in which the child's right to survival and health care as decreed by the Convention on Rights for the Child remains subject to overwhelming risks to life and health generated by the economic hardship."

"[Before the 1990 sanctions] primary medical care reached about 97% of the urban population, and 78% of rural residents...[Now] the health system is affected by lack of even basic hospital and health centre equipment and supplies for medical, surgical and diagnostic services...In 1989, the [Iraqi] Ministry of Health spent more than US\$500 million for drugs and supplies; the budget is [now] reduced by 90-95%."

only openness to the new world being shaped by globalization, a world in which distance shrinks but geography and culture remain strongly present in all spheres of human activity, but also a capacity for active participation in shaping this new world from a position of capability and security.

Wise, forward-looking and courageous responses by Arab countries to these challenges are needed to liberate the full potential of the region, capture the imaginations and minds of its young people, and transform the state of human development as portrayed by the foregoing data and in the next chapters of this Report.

Wise, forward-looking and courageous responses by Arab countries to these challenges are needed to liberate the full potential of the region.

Source: UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Iraq, 30 April 1998.