



ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

The Arab Human Development Report Series (2002 – 2005) - An Overview

This 2005 Report – *“Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World”*— represents the fourth and final instalment of the first series of UNDP’s Arab Human Development Reports, which began in 2002. Following is some essential background on the Arab Human Development Reports’ purpose, parameters, methodology, and key findings.

1. The genesis of the report; institutional sponsorship and preparation

The Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP/RBAS) first decided to produce a report on Arab human development in the opening years of the third millennium. This historic juncture prompted those concerned with a 21st century Arab renaissance to survey the situation of the Arab world and to reflect on the status of its human progress. This concern coincided with the arrival of an Arab woman at the head of the Regional Bureau - an innovator uniting both keen intellect and a high sense of purpose. Her decision to constitute an Advisory Board for the Bureau, composed of persons knowledgeable about development issues in the Arab countries, was pivotal. This helped to crystallise the idea and gave the project strong impetus.

UNDP had two special qualifications for the sponsorship of such a project. First, since 1990, the organisation has championed a progressive concept of development that went beyond the purely economic perspectives of the Bretton Woods institutions. The UNDP concept of development puts people first, and is concerned with the highest common elements of human well-being, not the lowest common denominators of economic existence. Secondly, the UNDP is one of the few international organisations with a department in its organisational map dedicated to the Arab countries in line with the membership of the League of Arab States, as compared to the structure followed by other international organisations. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, for instance, use “the Middle East and North Africa,” thus treating Arab and non-Arab countries as one area while failing to include some countries of the Arab League.

The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) has co-sponsored the Reports from their inception. Thus, from the outset, the Report appeared under the sponsorship of two of the most important organisations at the Arab and international levels concerned with development in the Arab countries. With the third Report (2004), the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Organisations (AGFUND) joined the original sponsors, broadening the range of Arab institutional support for the series.

A very large team, numbering around one hundred researchers and thinkers, all *independent of the sponsoring institutions*, prepares the report. Each is charged with a different task, whether as a contributing author, or as a member of the core team responsible for preparing the report, the Advisory Board, or the Readers' Groups that review the pre-final version of the report.¹ Consisting as it does of people from almost every Arab country and from a variety of scientific disciplines, generations, and schools of thought, the AHDR team is additionally distinguished by its multidisciplinary and highly diverse nature, and is reconstituted for each report according to the topic.

The Report adopts a holistic and comprehensive concept of human development that is far removed from conventional concepts of development, and which goes beyond even the narrow economic definition of "human development" in UNDP terminology. As used in this report, the concept is based on the fact that humans, by virtue simply of being human, have an inalienable right to a decent life in moral and material terms. The Report is rooted in this comprehensive view of the human being, and in the precedence of the human over the material and the economic.

Given this point of departure, it follows that the concept of human well being in the philosophy of human development encompasses more generous human horizons, such as the life-long acquisition of knowledge and the enjoyment of freedom, justice, human dignity, and beauty. Obviously, all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, origin, or belief are also excluded from this perspective.

2. Findings of the first three reports

The First Arab Human Development Report (2002), "Creating Opportunities for Future Generations"

The first AHDR (2002) concluded that "although Arab countries have made significant strides in more than one area of human development in the last three decades . . . the predominant characteristic of the current Arab reality seems to be the existence of deeply rooted shortcomings in the Arab institutional structure [which] are an obstacle to building human development."

The Report summarised these shortcomings as three deficits relating to knowledge acquisition, freedom and good governance and the empowerment of women. Taking into account these deficit areas in an alternative human development index reduces the ranking of the Arab countries on the standard human development index. This view underlined the full challenge of building human development, throughout the Arab world.

The achievement of human development in the Arab world requires the Arab countries to dedicate themselves to overcoming these deficits. Indeed, the goal should be to transform them into their opposites -- namely, advantages benefiting all Arab citizens, without discrimination, and in which Arab countries can take pride before the rest of the world.

Specifically, the Report ends by stressing the necessity for the Arab countries to devote themselves to the reconstitution of Arab societies on the bases of:

1. Absolute respect for human rights and freedoms as the cornerstone of that good governance needed for the realisation of human development.
2. The empowerment of Arab women by opening all opportunities, especially those that enable the development of human capabilities, to girls and women on the same footing as their male counterparts.

¹ Several non-Arab experts also participate in the critical reading of the pre-final versions.

3. The prioritisation of knowledge acquisition and the effective deployment of knowledge in the building and deployment of human capabilities in all forms of societal activity, with the aim of maximizing human well being in the region.

This is the *essence of the new approach* required if the crisis of human development in the Arab region is to be overcome. It is not, however, the ultimate aspiration. Steps to overcome the three deficits in the region need to be complemented by action to build Arab productive capabilities long weakened by the nature of Arab rentier economies and societies. In addition to reforming Arab institutional structures to better serve human development, and beyond the reform of regional and national governance systems to protect essential freedoms, it will be necessary to strengthen Arab co-operation and maximise the benefits of globalisation while taking precautions against its possible dangers.

The AHDR series was designed on the principle that the first Report, which appeared in July 2002, should be a full spectrum diagnostic of human development as defined by the Report. The success of the first AHDR spurred the sponsoring institutions and the Report team to initiate further editions to probe and address in depth specific issues of central importance for human development in the Arab countries. It followed naturally that subsequent editions should study each of the deficits identified by the first Report, with the goal of arriving at a strategic vision of how each deficit is to be overcome in the context of a human development project in the Arab world.

This practice began with AHDR 2, on the theme of knowledge.

The Second Arab Human Development Report (2003), “Building a Knowledge Society”

The second AHDR introduced the practice, continued in subsequent reports, of including an opening section that evaluates national, regional and global developments impacting the course of human development in the Arab world during the period in review.

Part 1 of that report confirms that the challenge of human development in the Arab countries, summarised in the three deficits exposed by AHDR 1, continues to be serious and significant. It observes that the challenge, especially in the field of freedoms, may well have increased as a result of global, regional, and local developments unfavourable to human development in the Arab world.

Section 2 contributes to the advancement of human development in the region by examining its knowledge gap in depth, with the objective of formulating a strategic vision for the establishment of a knowledge society in the Arab countries.

The report begins by stating that the region’s weakened capacity to disseminate and produce knowledge has become the chief limiting factor in its efforts to progress.

Yet the region possesses significant human capital which could, under different societal conditions, form a strong infrastructure for a knowledge renaissance. However, the absence of institutional support for academic research and the failure to provide an environment conducive to the development and encouragement of learning have led to an Arab brain drain to those Western nations in which knowledge is valued and where doors to distinction and prominence are open.

Similarly, the Arab knowledge enterprise is weakly and loosely structured in the absence of rational strategies, institutional values and frameworks supportive of the knowledge society. Furthermore, Arab societies have not freed themselves of dependence on modern Western knowledge sources. The report advocates jettisoning the idea that it is possible to import the results of learning without investing in basic, applied and theoretical

research and without creating national academic traditions, all of which are conditions for a renaissance of knowledge in the Arab countries.

AHDR 2003 concludes that Arab culture, *in its essence*, is capable of supporting the development of a flourishing knowledge society in the third millennium, just as it consummately did late in the first and early in the second millennia. This however calls for reform of certain constituents of this culture in its present form. On the other hand, and in contrast to the inherent promise of Arab culture, the Report reveals that several features of Arab political, social and economic structures constitute obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge. These features will require a more thoroughgoing reform than that proposed for Arab culture.

Obstacles to the acquisition of knowledge presented by the societal context in Arab countries increase the higher up the structure one goes. Thus, in the Report's analysis, the political hindrances to knowledge acquisition appear more deeply entrenched than those related to the social and economic structure. Freedom is in need of fundamental reinforcement as is the establishment of the good governance needed to guarantee its promotion and expansion. Arab co-operation must be rescued from its current low point; indeed, it must be strengthened and accelerated. And Arab countries must formulate a positive and well-balanced stand on globalisation, in the service of the building of a knowledge society in the region.

The second Report concludes with a strategic vision for the establishment of a knowledge society in Arab countries that is organised around five pillars:

1. *Guaranteeing the key freedoms of opinion, expression and association, safeguarded by good governance.*
2. *Disseminating high quality education for all, particularly through higher education, learning in early childhood, continuous education and life-long learning.*
3. *Embedding and ingraining science in society, building and broadening the capacity for research and development across societal activities and catching up with "the information age".*
4. *Shifting Arab socio-economic structures rapidly towards knowledge-based production.*
5. *Developing an authentic, broadminded and enlightened Arab knowledge model based on:*
 - returning to pure religion, free from political exploitation, and centred on *ijtihad* (independent interpretative scholarship);
 - advancing the Arabic language;
 - reclaiming the positive achievements of Arab heritage;
 - enriching, supporting and celebrating cultural diversity in the region;
 - and opening up to other cultures by
 - promoting translation from, and to other languages
 - making intelligent use of the fruits of other cultures
 - taking maximum advantage of the instrumentality of regional and international organisations; this requiring action for reform of the world order via the strengthening of Arab co-operation.

The significance of the AHDR for policy-making in Arab countries

1. The crisis of development in the Arab world has become so enormous, complex and involved that any true reform of any one of the aspects required to build a human renaissance in the region involves extending the reform effort to all dimensions of Arab society. As the strategic vision put forward for the establishment of a knowledge society in the Arab countries shows, the required societal reform extends to the prevailing culture and the current social and economic structures, and, before all else, to the political context at the national, regional, and global levels. Put differently, partial reform is no longer

sufficient no matter in how many areas it may be attempted; indeed, it is no longer possible. It follows that comprehensive societal reform in Arab countries can no longer be delayed or slowed down out of consideration for existing interests, whatever they may be, for the alternative will have disastrous consequences.

2. The political obstacles to human development in the Arab countries are the most deeply entrenched and have the most far-reaching negative impact on the chances for rebirth in the Arab world. This situation calls for radical reform of the power structure in Arab countries. The course of events in Arab countries could lead to violent social conflict to that end. However, the societal costs would be intolerable and unacceptable to any patriotic person jealous of the interests of the region as a whole. It follows that the sole alternative that can save the Arab world from the unimaginable catastrophes that will inevitably occur should current tendencies intensify is the creation of an historic process of negotiation among the vital forces within Arab societies. This would be a process aimed at achieving a radical change in the power structure as a first step towards the establishment of good governance that will protect freedom and guarantee its broadening and maintenance.
3. Reform must be from the inside and based on well balanced self-criticism and effective and authentic societal creativity participated in by all the vital forces in the Arab countries. Such reform should initiate societal change that is both acceptable to all and likely to last. In contrast, reform imposed from the outside will inevitably serve the interests of those who impose it and not those of the Arabs, just as it will inevitably bring in its train legitimate resistance. The lessons of Palestine and Iraq are sufficient examples.
4. Despite this, the Arab renaissance needs to remain open to the world and to human civilisation at large, to which the Arabs have made a real contribution and in which effective participation is an honour that must be recovered. Obscurantism and withdrawal can only breed stagnation and impotence. At the same time, the world order is itself in need of reform, which would significantly improve opportunities for rebirth in the Arab region, which has long suffered from the deep injustice of the existing order.
5. Inter-Arab co-operation is one of the cornerstones of a human renaissance in the region. It is also a precondition for the reform of the global environment in such a way as to permit this rebirth to proceed. In the area of knowledge acquisition specifically and of human development in general, the weakness of regional co-operation represents an abandonment of a national, and even human, duty, and must be overcome.

The Third Arab Human Development Report (2004): "Towards Freedom in the Arab World"

The third AHDR concluded that: "the Arab world finds itself at a historical crossroads. Caught between oppression at home and violation from abroad, Arabs are increasingly excluded from determining their own future.

Freedom, in its comprehensive sense, incorporates not only civil and political freedoms (in other words, liberation from oppression), but also the liberation from all factors that are inconsistent with human dignity. To be sustained and guaranteed, freedom requires a system of good governance that rests upon effective popular representation and is accountable to the people, and that upholds the rule of law and ensures that an independent judiciary applies the law impartially.

The Report describes free societies, in their normative dimension, as fundamental contrasts with present-day Arab societies. The enormous gap that separates today's reality and what many in the region hope for is a source of widespread frustration and despair among Arabs about their countries' prospects for a peaceful transition to societies enjoying freedom and good governance. Moreover, persisting tendencies in Arab social structures could well lead to spiralling social, economic and political crises. Each further stage of crisis would impose itself as a new reality, producing injustices eventually beyond control.

The Arab world is at a decisive point that does not admit compromise or complacency.

If the Arab people are to have true societies of freedom and good governance, they will need to be socially innovative. Their challenge is to create a viable mode of transition from a situation where liberty is curtailed and oppression the rule to one of freedom and good governance that minimises social upheaval and human costs, to the fullest extent possible. History will judge this a transcendent achievement through which the region finally attained its well-deserved freedom.”

3. The Fourth Arab Human Development Report, 2005 – “Towards the rise of women in the Arab World”

Section 1: Changes in human development

The Report observes that, in terms of reform at the national level, “*the Arab spring has yet to bloom.*” Elections have been held in the region but these were flawed and for this reason do not guarantee the enjoyment of freedom and good governance according to the report’s definition. Similarly, cosmetic reforms that hide the continuing repression of freedom through the uninterrupted violation of human rights have been put in place. Civil society’s struggle for freedom in Arab countries has, however, intensified.

The reform process in Arab countries has coincided with *an unfavourable regional and global climate*, some of whose aspects the report sets out as follows:

- The passing of the *Global Anti-Semitism Review Act* by the US Congress, whose tenth finding equates anti-Semitism with opposition to Zionism.
- The branding of the region, and Islam, as “breeding grounds for terrorism.”

Foreign occupation continued to pose a threat to freedom and human development equally.

- In Palestine, where unilateral disengagement took place without bringing Israel’s control of Gaza to an end, occupation continued to block human development throughout the Palestinian territories.
- In Iraq, the occupation’s numerous losses became clear in a context of extreme concern for an apparently flawed political process.

Section 2: Towards the rise of women in the Arab world

The Report takes as its starting point the core concept of the AHDR series. Namely, freedom, in the comprehensive sense which is commensurate with human development, demands that equality between women and men be a *sine qua non* of societies that uphold human dignity.

Consequently, the rise of women, as a state of perfection in the society of freedom that the third AHDR calls for, will be realised by eliminating all that impairs the human dignity of all women on an equal footing with men in Arab countries.

The definition of freedom used here is not limited to the complete enjoyment of civil and political rights, which are the mainstay of citizenship, but extends to emancipation from other factors that diminish human dignity, such as ignorance, disease, want and fear. This comprehensive concept of freedom complements both the AHDR concept and the entire human rights vision.

Thus the ultimate goal of the rise of women in the Arab world is the enjoyment by all women in the Arab countries of all the elements of the human rights vision, on an equal footing with men.

The Report concludes that the state of women in Arab countries results from a number of cultural, social, economic and political factors that interact in a complex fashion. Some of these are problematic in nature and thus call for a broad and deep analysis of the numerous components of Arab society in an attempt to diagnose the varying conditions of women in Arab countries. The Report interprets these conditions as a first step towards developing a strategic vision for the rise of women in the Arab world.

The Report traces the situation of women in the Arab world along the axes of human development, thus focusing on the acquisition and deployment of human capabilities, and the level of human well being resulting there from. It also assesses the experiences of women's movements in Arab countries, analysing their different goals at different times, as well as the forms of social action that these movements engaged in. Both factors are crucial in understanding and supporting the rise of women in the Arab world.

The analysis ends by stating that the basic principle of Islam is equality among humans, and among men and women in particular. Certain jurisprudential interpretations have, however, contributed to the entrenchment of a lower status for women in some Islamic societies.

In its final chapter, the Report draws its analysis and interpretations into a strategic vision, offering broad guidance for the rise of women in the Arab world as a complementary dimension of building an Arab society of knowledge, freedom and good governance. It firmly places the advancement of women within a broader human renaissance in the Arab world in keeping with the AHDR's comprehensive vision.

Indeed, the report stresses that an Arab renaissance cannot be accomplished without the rise of women in Arab countries. This requires going beyond the establishment of rights and justice for women in the face of the historic wrongs they have suffered. The latter is both a duty and a demand, but the advance of Arab women goes beyond righting wrongs to a concern for the well being of the Arab world as a whole.

Undeniably, Arab countries have realised substantial achievements, to which the progress so far made by women bears witness. Nevertheless we still have far to go to reach our desired goals. The way forward to successful human development in Arab countries lies in *completing the huge tasks already undertaken to promote the rise of women* rather than in lauding earlier achievements.

We envisage the societal reforms that would enable women to rise as one wing of the bird on whose back Arab women will soar. Such reforms must guarantee the full citizenship rights of women in line with the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The social reform package conducive to the rise of women includes:

- Using the enlightened findings of *Shar`ia* law, as elucidated by independent interpretative scholarship, to align national legislation with CEDAW.
- Eliminating the seeds of discrimination in culture in Arab countries.
- Enacting and implementing legislative reform to guarantee the harmony of the law with CEDAW.
- Combating poverty and deprivation.
- Reforming patterns of child raising, and especially education and the media, to instil an awareness of the need for equal treatment between the sexes.

A bird, however, needs two wings to fly. The second wing is the rise of a widespread and effective movement of struggle in Arab civil society. This movement will embrace Arab women and their male supporters in activities of increasing breadth and depth. It will aim to improve their participation in carefully targeted societal

reform on the one hand, and, on the other, empower all Arab women to enjoy the fruits of changes that serve the rise of both women and the region.

The Report calls for adoption of the principle of *temporary positive discrimination [affirmative action?]* in each Arab society, according to its particular circumstances, so as to enlarge the range of openings for women in various areas of human activity. These measures would remain in force until the centuries-old discrimination against women crumbles. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for women to hold the positions they merit in Arab societies without help in the initial stages of a shift towards a society that guarantees women their human rights.

The Report argues that ending once and for all the denial to girls and women of their human right to education, within, say, ten years, constitutes a critical goal of women's movements, official and non-official, national as well as regional. It thus calls for *the elimination of female illiteracy and the completion by all girls of twelve years of basic education in all Arab countries by the start of 2015*. This goal, and the success achieved in reaching it, should become a basic criterion for assessing the seriousness and the usefulness of the movement for the rise of women in the Arab world.

At the same time, universal education for women should be complemented by *eliminating all barriers to the employment of women's capabilities* in the various spheres of human activity, as they themselves, in complete freedom, may choose.