

**TOWARDS THE RISE OF WOMEN
IN THE ARAB WORLD**



A STRATEGIC VISION: TWO WINGS FOR THE RISE OF WOMEN

Introduction

An Arab renaissance cannot be accomplished without the rise of women in Arab countries. This calls for more than the establishment of rights and justice for women in the face of the historic wrongs that they have suffered. The latter is both a duty and a demand, but supporting the advance of Arab women transcends righting wrongs. Directly and indirectly, it concerns the well-being of the entire Arab world.

Undeniably, Arab countries have realised substantial achievements, to which the progress made by women to date bears witness. Nevertheless, there is still far to go to attain the desired goals envisioned.

Indeed, the tide of society's support for the rise of women has ebbed noticeably over the last five decades compared to the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Low levels of human development and a lack of essential freedoms in the region arising from a social environment in which conservative and inflexible political forces have gained sway have caused institutional backing for the rise of women to recede (AHDR 2004).

The preceding chapters have shown that substantial tasks remain to be addressed if Arab women are to advance through the acquisition and use of their capabilities and the full enjoyment of rights. The analysis has also demonstrated that a complex web of cultural, social, economic and political factors, some ambiguous in nature, keeps Arab women in thrall. Cultural hangovers perpetuate a strong bias against women while societal structures, especially those that influence child-raising, education, the media and family relations, affect attitudes towards women in society as a whole. Along with numerous legal obstacles,

these factors variously prevent women from acquiring and using capabilities that would help them and society to progress. Moreover, women are also denied the enjoyment of human rights on an equal footing with men, which further blocks their advance.

The present Report places great emphasis on female education. However, it stresses that the importance of educating girls in Arab countries goes well beyond enabling society to deploy their capabilities. It is apparent that the failure to educate girls in the region is due essentially to cultural prejudices against women or to economic constraints of the family or the society. Girls have proven themselves to be excellent students, yet inequality of educational opportunities remains a serious obstacle to the advancement of women, reflected in the fact that illiteracy in Arab countries is more widespread among women than men.

The relatively weak employment of Arab women's capabilities in the economic sector and in the political sphere is also attributable to overall social, cultural and economic conditions and to the state of governance.

Hence social reform for the advancement of women needs to be undertaken as part of a comprehensive human renaissance project in the Arab world, which is one of the two wings supporting the rise of women in the strategic vision presented in this chapter.

Notwithstanding such general constraints, some Arab women have been able to realise outstanding achievements in different fields. Such achievements, however, remain limited to those women who have had the opportunity to acquire skills and to participate in various human endeavours. Their successes illustrate the importance of taking affirmative action to enable women to enter all fields of human activity. This will, in turn, inspire more women

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Full opportunities should be given to Arab women for effective participation in all types of human activity outside the family and on an equal footing with their male counterparts, also essential that the appropriate social value be given to women's role in the family as an indispensable contribution to the establishment of a sound social structure.

to seek higher levels of participation, which will serve both the advancement of women and the goals of human development.

The way forward to successful human development in Arab countries lies in completing the substantial tasks already undertaken to promote the rise of women rather than in lauding earlier achievements. A good omen in this regard is that public opinion, as reflected in the survey, offers strong moral support for the rise of women as part of a comprehensive human renaissance in the Arab world (Box 10-1).

FIRST: KEY FEATURES OF THE STRATEGIC VISION

The rise of Arab women must go beyond a merely symbolic makeover that permits a few distinguished Arab women to ascend to positions of leadership in State institutions, notwithstanding the value and importance of this. Rather, it must extend to the empowerment of the broad masses of Arab women in their entirety.

From the perspective of human development as a process of societal change, the rise of Arab women requires, first, that all Arab women be granted full and genuine opportunities to acquire essential capabilities; this is so especially in the area of health, in its positive and comprehensive sense. As a first requirement, all Arab girls and women must

also acquire knowledge on an equal footing with boys and men.

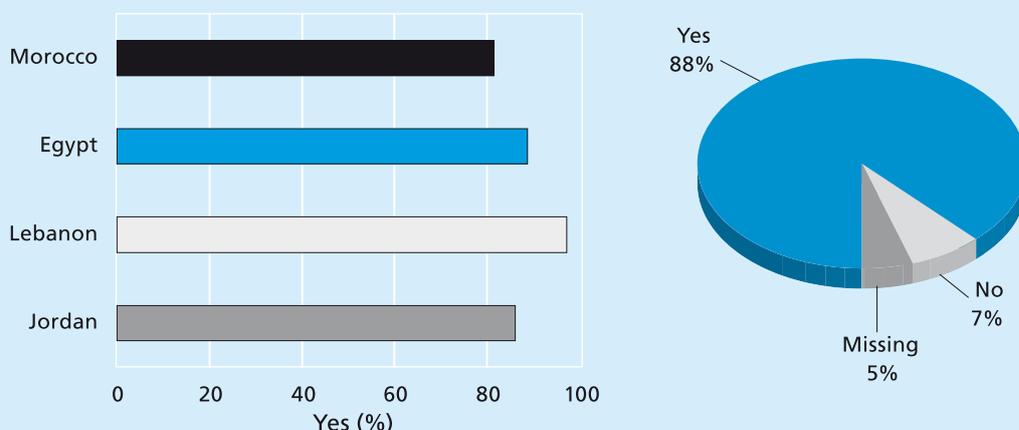
Second, it is a requirement that full opportunities be given to Arab women for effective participation in all types of human activity outside the family and on an equal footing with their male counterparts, and that this effective participation be the consequence of their own freely taken decisions.

It is also essential that the appropriate social value be given to women's role in the family as an indispensable contribution to the establishment of a sound social structure capable of supporting a project for the renaissance of the Arab world. The Arab Human Development Reports, especially those concerned with the two axes of knowledge and freedom, have underlined the importance of social upbringing. They have stressed the primary importance of the family in providing youth with knowledge and critical faculties and thence the capacity to innovate and create and in endowing children with positive values, such as initiative and a sense of belonging to society, all of which make the progress of society possible. Thus, enabling women to build their capabilities is the crucial foundation that prepares them to play a positive, creative role as women in raising children, strengthening family bonds of affection and cohesion, and empowering all family members to participate effectively in the project for Arab renaissance.

BOX 10-1

Public Opinion on Aspects of the Rise of Arab Women, Four Arab Countries, 2005

Building an Arab human renaissance demands the rise of Arab women



This positive, creative role is, however, beyond the capacity of women who are subjugated and denied their rights, hence the value of a process for the implementation in Arab countries of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially those clauses that decree equal treatment between the sexes and guarantee the rights of girls.

Thus, it is of paramount importance to reform Arab education in such a way as to ensure that all girls are guaranteed opportunities to acquire knowledge and to use it within and outside the family.

The next strategic priority is freedom. Focusing on this subject, AHDR 2004 called for the rise of Arab women, and in particular:

- total respect for the rights of citizenship of all Arab women on the grounds that they are a basic axis of the Arab societal structure;
- the protection of women's rights in the area of personal affairs and family relations; and
- guarantees of total respect for women's personal rights and freedoms and, in particular, the protection of women, in all stages of their lives, from physical and mental abuse.

The achievement of these rights requires extensive and profound legal and institutional reform aimed at attaining conformity with international human rights standards and laws relating to the protection of women's rights as reflected in CEDAW. Almost all Arab countries have acceded to this Convention though a number of them have registered reservations to certain articles. Other sections of this Report show that these reservations can be overcome without violating the tolerant essence of shari'a (Islamic law). They also underline the critical need to adopt independent interpretative reasoning in jurisprudence to achieve this objective.

This Report also calls for the temporary adoption of the principle of affirmative action or positive discrimination in expanding the participation of women to all fields of human activity in every Arab society according to the particular circumstances of each. This will allow the dismantling of the centuries-old

structures of discrimination against women. Such discrimination has made it difficult, if not impossible, for women to assume, without assistance, their rightful place in Arab societies, which are in the early stages of a shift towards a society that does not defraud women or deprive them of their human rights.

The definitive elimination of all forms of discrimination against women is a struggle against a massive historical injustice, one that will involve thwarting those responsible for it long into the future. This demands the adoption of temporary preferential support, or the principle of affirmative action in favour of women, at least in the initial stages of action, to correct historic injustices. This must be done judiciously and by methods that do not themselves inadvertently weaken those who need to be strong and bold. Affirmative action should enable women to become effective in the face of strengthened competition rather than providing them an absolute protection that might weaken their role. This is not a simple equation, but it is essential.

It is thus important that affirmative action in favour of women does not entice them and the men who support them to waver in the essential struggle to claim their rights on the basis of merit. For example, it might be appropriate to allocate quotas for women in legislative elections at the local and central levels, and even better to see them named on the lists of competing parties. At the same time, however, it would be preferable to maintain the principle of competition between women within the allocations such that this positive discrimination leads to the emergence of the best female candidates.

The Report team sees no validity in the argument that holds that quotas are unconstitutional and undermine equality between citizens. Quotas for women are especially necessary in countries where discriminatory clauses are embedded in their legal structures (AHDR 2004, chapter 4). This also applies to specific countries that already use the quota system for other purposes, such as Egypt, which constitutionally allocates half of its parliamentary seats to "farmers and labourers".

It should be noted at this point that the package of reforms outlined here is consistent

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The rise of Arab women requires a complex, comprehensive review of frameworks of thought and behaviour at all levels.

with the strategic visions presented in earlier editions of the Arab Human Development Report, namely, those for the establishment of a knowledge-based society and for a shift towards freedom in the Arab world.

Societal reforms are envisioned that will enable women to ascend and that will guarantee their rights in line with CEDAW as one wing of a bird on whose back Arab women will soar.

A bird, however, needs two wings to fly. The second wing is the emergence of a broad 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 seek 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 as a whole.

The completion of the opening act of the *izdihar* scenario set out in AHDR 2004, which is based on total respect for the key freedoms of opinion, expression and particularly, organisation, will assist in the birth and growth of this movement and set the stage for the rise of Arab women. It is this scenario that will usher in a dynamic civil society able to act as the vanguard of the struggle for human renaissance in the Arab world.

The great majority of Arab women are marginalised, at a higher than average rate, through no fault of their own and in thrall to the current power structure, the most significant of whose evils is the exclusion of various groups.

The Report does not assume that the marginalised will be transformed spontaneously into ascending forces within the power structure in Arab countries. One might dwell on “what ought to be,” but nothing will be accomplished without struggle. The social movement is about precisely that. What is required is a historic struggle whose domain is the current power structure and whose objective is the just redistribution of power among people in general. Stated more clearly, what is required is that power be transferred, through effort, debate and struggle, from those who have monopolised it to its true owners, the Arab people, and especially the women among them.

SECOND: THE FIRST WING: SOCIETAL REFORM FOR THE RISE OF ARAB WOMEN

The rise of Arab women cannot take place in isolation from the rise of their societies. Likewise, in this perhaps more than in any other area of human rights, the passing of laws and regulations that aim to eliminate all aspects of discrimination is not sufficient. In addition to laws, women’s awareness of their rights and of how these are affected by society and society’s awareness of women’s issues both need to be strengthened. The weakest obstacle to the realisation of human rights is the lack of awareness by individuals of their rights, and the worst types of violations are those that society accepts. Both constitute a major obstacle in the path to the rise of women.

The rise of Arab women requires a complex, comprehensive review of frameworks of thought and behaviour at all levels. In line with this, new strategies will be proposed that include the various institutions of Arab societies.

ELIMINATING THE ROOTS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS

1. The encouragement of independent scholarship (*ijtihad*) in religious matters to overcome cultural obstacles to the rise of women

At the level of culture, the fundamental obstacle to the rise of women remains how to deal with certain conflicts between international standards on the one hand and religious and cultural beliefs on the other. The issue is sometimes referred to as “the conflict of authorities”. “Religious beliefs” here does not refer to the Islamic religion alone, though that is always the focus, but also includes Christian beliefs since the stance of both divinely revealed religions towards issues such as abortion and a number of reproductive health issues is similar.

Responses to this conflict take one of two forms. One approach, prominent in international efforts and adopted by many

supporters of women's rights in the region, is inclined to favour international standards. The other seeks to bridge the gulf between international standards and religious principles through initiatives in interpretation.

Undoubtedly, forcing the public to choose between international standards and their own religious beliefs and cultural traditions will create an insurmountable obstacle to the rise of women. Thus, in the view of the Report team, there is no alternative to supporting the second approach, which tries to use independent interpretation to establish congruence between international standards and religious cultural principles evolving, in the case of Islam, from a holistic understanding of the Islamic shari'a. Since "there is no priesthood in Islam", it follows that such initiatives in jurisprudence must be released from the grip of religious institutions and personages. Rather, independent interpretation must become the right and duty of every qualified Muslim, woman or man, who has the capacity to engage in the study of her or his religion.

2. Upbringing, education and the media; resisting stereotypes of women in order to spread a culture of equality

The lack of clarity in cultural and social concepts at the level of roles, functions and rights constitutes an obstacle to the rise of women. The clarity of the image of women in society is related to the clarity of these concepts; education and the media have a pivotal role in creating authentic images rather than stereotypes. They thus have an obligation to work to change misleading images through a societal programme for the rise of women.

Family upbringing discriminates between the male and female in matters of freedoms, responsibilities and rights. Therefore, discrimination must be investigated, brought to a halt and punished.

Female upbringing in Arab societies is subject to various forms of discrimination deriving from a male system of values about child-raising and a legal philosophy based on perpetuating male authority. This environment shakes women's self-confidence and undermines their self-image. Likewise, male cultural content determines women's fate and

dominates the way in which they think. Thus, even if the law were to allow the participation of women in national decision-making, the culture of society would not easily do so.

In education, efforts to promote equal treatment between the sexes would benefit from the introduction of modern technologies as aids in revamping curricula and teaching and assessment methods.

In the media, the problem is not only that programmes intended to strengthen the status of women and build respect for their role in society are sometimes deficient. It is also that many soap operas and shows as well as vulgar advertisements often erode serious efforts to promote the rise of women. The problem is compounded by the spread of illiteracy, which has made the broadcast media a primary source of popular culture. Hence, the strengthening of methods for monitoring and analysing women's image in the Arab media is an important priority.

The media should also play an active role in educating the public about the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Report's field survey revealed a very low level of public awareness of this convention across the Arab countries.

Correcting women's self-image: Women's self-image decides the roles and occupations for which a woman believes that she is fit. A distorted self-image perpetuates this marginalisation, which serves the interests of the paternalistic authoritarian regime and which makes it even more difficult to bring women into the higher levels of institutions. Parents and educators can work to implant positive images of girls and women, starting with the very young and their early childhood experiences and moving up through the education system, supported by an enlightened media.

This wholesome vision of gender relations must be popularised in order to improve personal and social interactions and introduce democracy into the web of institutional relationships. This is a major task for schools, universities and the media, involving values and role models. New and dependable media channels should be opened to support this vision along with major efforts in the family and

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Rooting out ingrained biases against women requires educating society to bring about attitudinal shifts.

society to create a mutually supportive culture of equals.

In particular, the purification of the social structure from the roots of discrimination requires a greater role of men in the rise of women.

Women have taken up the cause of their development and rise within a cultural, social and political framework that assumes respect for freedoms, rights and responsibilities. Unless men take up the same cause of their own accord, there can be no hope of changing the relationships between the sexes in the direction of a coherent life governed by love and happiness, and no hope of changing laws. If men do not make this issue their own before it becomes an objective public issue, their perplexed and confused position towards women's pursuit of their own cause will make their own position even more untenable. This entails pain, sorrow and great loss.

There is a strong correlation between the movement towards a society of freedom and good governance...and the formation of a social movement for the rise of women.

POLITICAL REFORM

In the general sections on the rise of women in the Arab world, the Report postulated the critical role played by a struggling civil movement rooted in a lively and active civil society and undertaking the difficult tasks of the development of women. It referred to the fact that such a movement would require a political reform that begins with the opening scenario from the *izdihar* act in AHDR 2004 (Chapter 9), based on the total respect for key freedoms: opinion, expression and organisation. The latter, being the basis of political and civic organisation, is perhaps the most important in this context. There is therefore a strong correlation between the movement towards a society of freedom and good governance according to the vision of the third AHDR and the institutional requirements necessary for the formation of a social movement for the rise of women in the Arab world.

There is yet another correlation, however. The move towards a society of freedom and good governance requires wide legislative reforms. It is important that these reforms include guarantees for women's development.

Legislative reform

The analysis of trends in Arab legislation in relation to equality between men and women (chapter 8) shows that a review of the Arab legislative structure is essential to eliminate all forms of legal discrimination against women. This overhaul should be accomplished in concrete terms through the following measures:

1. Arab States should review the reservations that they have registered with regard to CEDAW in order to:
 - Remove all reservations against Article 2 of the Convention, which prescribes the principle of equality, because these reservations are incompatible with the objectives of the Convention, contrary to Article 4 of the Convention and incompatible with international treaty law.
 - Remove reservations that use the pretext that the provision in the Convention is contrary to national law because countries are obliged to amend their national law to bring it into conformity with the provisions in the Convention.
 - Undertake a detailed study of the relationship between the provisions of the Convention and the absolute and fixed rules of shari'a (Islamic law) so that incompatibilities, if any, can be identified and specified and reservations clearly defined. General reservations that the provisions of the Convention are in conflict with the rules of shari'a should not be entered without stating the evidence for this. It is also important to adopt enlightened interpretations that bring the ultimate goals of shari'a into conformity with international human rights law.
 - Ratification of the Optional Protocol remains the touchstone of the seriousness of a country's accession to the Convention.
2. Arab countries should review legislation regulating political rights in order to guarantee women the exercise of these rights on an equal footing with men as well as their observance by all public officials

in their functions. This applies particularly to the judiciary at all levels as well as to political, administrative, local government and academic leaders.

3. In this context, it is appropriate that Arab legislators adopt a system of quotas for women, who have historically been denied the right to participation, in the various legislative and representative assemblies.
4. Arab countries should be called upon to ratify conventions of the International Labour Organisation that relate to women's employment, equal pay and working conditions and the provision of protection for working women.
5. Arab countries should review their labour legislation to provide additional protection for working women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against them, in particular against poor and marginalised women who perform work in sectors that are not protected by labour law, such as domestic service and the rural sector. It is also essential that congruity be attained between Arab legislation and the conventions of the International Labour Organisation, especially the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100).
6. A review of criminal legislation and criminal procedures should be undertaken to eliminate all legal texts that contain discrimination against women. This should cover texts that discriminate in punishment for the crime of adultery; those that discriminate in reducing the punishment for crimes of honour committed by a husband rather than a wife; and those that absolve the perpetrator of a crime of rape from punishment if he marries the victim of the rape. Other prescribed legal provisions or procedures that involve discrimination on grounds of sex should also be removed.
7. A review of the legal system relating to personal status in Arab countries should be undertaken to eliminate discrimination against women. In this regard, it is essential that Arab countries lacking unified personal status legislation adopt such legislation. Moreover, Arab legislators must act to adopt

the most enlightened efforts in shari'a and other religious laws for achieving conformity with the principle of equal treatment for men and women, one that accords with the overall intentions of Islamic and non-Muslim religious law.

8. A request should be made to the Arab League through the Secretariat of the Arab Council of Ministers of Justice to modernise the draft unified model of Arab personal status legislation. The goal will be to bring the model in line with modern life and the international obligations of Arab countries, especially those that relate to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Such modernisation should also include solutions adopted in a number of modern Arab personal status laws and be based on responsive and open-minded jurisprudential interpretations.
9. A review of nationality laws in Arab countries should be undertaken to achieve equal treatment for men and women in the granting of nationality to their children.
10. A culture of equal treatment and respect for human rights should be encouraged among men in the judiciary and all those responsible for enforcing the rule of law. The involvement of women on an equal footing with men in all judicial and other functions relating to law enforcement should be a parallel priority.

COMBATING POVERTY IN SUPPORT OF THE RISE OF WOMEN

The most important area of intervention lies in reducing the spread of income poverty which entails supporting economic growth and achieving greater justice in income distribution. While addressing income poverty, it is equally important to reverse the spread of human poverty, by which is meant the denial to people of opportunities to acquire and use essential human capabilities.

Income growth requires in its turn increased investment and institution-building, meaning the laws, rules, regulations and customs that regulate the social interaction between individuals, in addition to strengthening the foundations of good governance. Likewise,

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equity in income distribution is not only a value in and of itself; it also operates in the long run to support growth, especially in developing countries.

Among the most important mechanisms for attaining social justice and combating human poverty are increases in expenditure on education, particularly for girls, and on health and social safety nets. These areas constitute an investment in humanity and lead in the end to an expansion of people's options.

Reducing human poverty also requires significantly more investment in public health, including investment in the health of infants, the health of children below the age of five and the reproductive health of women. It also calls for increased investment in environmental health.

CONFRONTING REDUCTIONS IN WOMEN'S PERSONAL FREEDOMS

Violence against women is abhorrent in itself and also because it constitutes a complete negation of their human rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men as guaranteed under international treaties. Arab countries that seek to achieve human development must necessarily protect women from violence on the grounds that protection from violence is the responsibility of States, as provided for in Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

In order to guarantee the freedom and human dignity of all women in the Arab world, it is absolutely necessary that the protection of personal freedom be extended to female guest workers in the Arab countries, no matter where on the scale their occupations fall. The protection of the rights of the vulnerable guests is a fundamental yardstick for measuring the extent to which personal rights and freedoms are respected in any society.

The protection of women from all forms of violence in the Arab countries demands important changes at the level of collective awareness. It calls for a strategy derived from an understanding that violence against women in all forms is a degradation of their humanity, a violation of their human rights, and a threat to the psychological and physical harmony of the family and children. The strategy should

also recognise that discrimination on the basis of sex is the principal starting point for the use of violence. Foremost in this area are efforts to forbid and criminalise the circumcision of females.

Arab officials need to be aware and convinced that the prevailing perception of the status of women and their role in society must change. This presupposes the spread and strengthening of a culture of human rights, equality of treatment between the sexes and the right of both to full citizenship. These goals can be realised through social education at the levels of the family, schools, mosques and the media.

It is crucial that laws criminalise violence against women and that States as well as civil society organisations provide safe sanctuaries for women victims of violence, as needed.

THIRD: THE SECOND WING: A SOCIETAL MOVEMENT FIT TO BRING ABOUT THE RISE OF WOMEN IN THE ARAB WORLD

There will be no rise of women in the Arab world without a strong and continuously growing societal movement by which Arab women may empower themselves and their male supporters to eliminate the legacy of backwardness by eliminating "all forms of discrimination against women in Arab society" in the context of building a human renaissance on Arab soil. The use here of language from the text of CEDAW is not accidental. Rather, it serves as a reminder that this national objective is, at the same time, an international objective that humanity as a whole seeks to achieve. It is also an Arab commitment towards the international community, which makes it a fundamental component of the legal structure of Arab countries.

There is no doubt that this movement will create, through the struggle, its own particular means and instruments that will lead to the historic goal of the rise of women in the Arab world.

Nevertheless, this historic task requires effort and sacrifice, especially by vanguard social institutions and intellectuals. Are these ready and able to undertake such efforts?

Finally, those who desire to build a human renaissance must strive, with a commitment that goes beyond mere aspiration, to build the tools for this struggle. In other words, a strong societal movement geared towards the rise of women is needed in order to overcome the current power structure.

As envisaged in this Report, this movement has two levels. The first is national and will involve all levels of society in every Arab country. The second is regional: it will be founded on trans-border networks for the coordination and support of regional efforts to achieve a comprehensive Arab movement for the rise of Arab women, benefiting as far as possible from modern information and communication technology.

Optimally, the national and regional components of such a movement would form strong ties based on a partnership of equals with United Nations and international organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that are working for the rise of women and their emancipation in all parts of the world.

The success of Arab countries in achieving results appropriate for Arabs and the position to which they aspire among world nations, is based on the capacity of a women's societal movement to plan, coordinate, monitor, evaluate and create the empowering environment for the rise of Arab women. Guaranteeing a favourable climate in each Arab country (including among the executive, legislative and judicial authorities) is a sine qua non of this enabling social environment. It will permit the growth of the legal and procedural structure for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. Such a climate will allow organisations defending women's rights to flourish, to champion the most crucial of these rights and to monitor their implementation once established. Paramount among such rights will be equality with respect for gender differences and guaranteed rights of citizenship.

Crucially, such an environment will facilitate the genesis of effective civil society

organisations for the rise of women through collective struggle.¹ It will not only encourage the growth of such organisations; it will also support and guarantee their impact as transparent, democratic and sustainable entities and as contributors to society as a whole. This includes strengthening the accountability of such organisations before the majority of women to protect the latter's interests.

In particular, civil society organisations working for the advancement of women must be converted into self-reliant, sustainable institutions in order to be effective. Such organisations need to be truly popular with women and their male supporters, be ready to act as driving forces, and be willing to establish internal democracy, including transparency and accountability before the generality of women and Arab citizens.

The sum of such organisations, if they are interlinked and mutually supportive, can create the framework of a movement for the advancement of Arab women that could serve as an engine of progress for the entire Arab world.

In addition, laws governing civil society must contain provisions that specifically empower citizens, in particular women, to freely establish associations working for the rise of women and to play an effective role in their competent government and management. This area is undoubtedly one requiring the sustained attention of existing agencies, such as the Arab Women's Organisation.

The Report has pointed in several places to the universal nature of the struggle for women's rights and of the women's liberation movement itself. International solidarity opens wide perspectives for women in the Arab world. Such solidarity will have the greatest impact if it takes the form of effective cooperation through equal partnerships between like-minded international civil society organisations, international agencies and Arab women's groups without the political and cultural biases that often vitiate external reform initiatives.

Civil society organisations working for the advancement of women must be converted into self-reliant, sustainable institutions.

¹ The Report does not say "women's organisations," as the Report team sees the rise of women as a collective task in which the efforts of women and their male counterparts are mutually supportive.

FOURTH: PRIORITIES IN THE PROGRAMME FOR THE RISE OF ARAB WOMEN

The general trend to ensure positive health for all, which is one of the components necessary to build human development, extends automatically to the provision of special care for the needs of the weak in general and of women in particular.

The Arab Human Development Report customarily includes within its strategic vision broad outlines for overcoming the particular deficit that is the focus of the Report. These outlines are offered so that engaged forces in Arab societies can consider the vision presented, place it within their particular context and adopt the means and methods for achieving its objectives after verifying local needs and resources.

In line with this tradition, those that take up the vision may decide to formulate specific plans for women's development within their particular national context, including the necessary steps, means and methods to achieve these objectives. It is hoped that the strategic vision and broad outline of action offered here will encourage the development and adoption of detailed plans conceived and owned by broad social forces, which will ensure the extension and success of the modest efforts of the Report team.

However, the Report team's broad approach does not preclude suggesting some programmatic priorities that may serve as an additional guide for societal action. Thus, the Report proposes a number of priorities and starting points for women's development in the context of a comprehensive project for human development in the Arab world. They are grouped under two basic goals:

- overcoming obstacles to women's acquisition of essential human capabilities, and
- guaranteeing women's ability to effectively employ their capabilities as they choose.

Women's acquisition of basic human capabilities gradually paves the way for removing the relatively greater obstacles to the employment of their capacities. A woman who is well educated and enjoys good health is keener to employ her skills in a wide range of human activities. Nevertheless, experience indicates that, in the current social context, women with highly developed capabilities do not necessarily find society willing or able to employ their capacities in all spheres of human enterprise. Therefore, special efforts are

required to enable women in the Arab region to use the full range of their capacities, especially through temporary affirmative action, such as quota systems, while ensuring the principle of competition within such measures.

FIRST: ELIMINATING WOMEN'S LEGACY OF DEPRIVATION IN HEALTH AND IN KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION THROUGH EDUCATION

Health care

Guaranteeing good health, in a comprehensive sense, is a matter that lies beyond the capacity of most women in contemporary Arab countries and is most difficult for those who are weakest socially. Women suffer more than men because of the problems of pregnancy and childbirth and because of a general lifestyle that discriminates against them, as revealed in high rates of maternal mortality and a greater loss of years of life to illness relative to men.

Thus, the general trend to ensure positive health for all, which is one of the components necessary to build human development, extends automatically, or so it would seem, to the provision of special care for the needs of the weak in general and of women in particular. Implementation of this Report's previous recommendations for the elimination of poverty, and especially human poverty, are relevant here.

Ending the denial of education to girls and women

Putting an end, once and for all, to the denial to girls and women of their human right to education over a period of, say, ten years is an indispensable requirement. There is a long and discredited discussion relating to plans and programmes to eliminate female illiteracy in Arab countries, a goal that remains far from realisation. Thus, the movement for women's development in the Arab world is called upon to embark on a serious, substantial programme, with official and civic dimensions as well as regional and national ones over the time-bound

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period of a decade, which would ensure all girls and women of a complete basic education. A specific goal, would be to achieve, by 2015, the eradication of Arab female illiteracy and to ensure the completion of twelve years of basic schooling by every Arab girl. These should become the criteria for assessing and measuring the seriousness and success of the women's movement in the Arab nation.

In the overall ordering of education with all its components, committed efforts are necessary to eliminate any seeds of discrimination between the sexes. The two international conventions (CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child) which, luckily, most Arab countries joined became inseparable parts of the Arab legislative system and provide a conceptual and legal framework for guaranteeing the rights and protections (especially freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex) that their provisions contain.

There is a powerful dialectic between the power structure and the educational system. One outcome of the present crisis between the people and the government system has been the denial of any form of education enabling the mass of women to progress. There is no disputing, however, that the improvement of education, especially the provision of widespread high-quality education, supports the empowerment of the marginalised and is hence a major priority of the social struggle that can lead to the rise of women. These efforts may be assisted by an educational system that is strong, non-governmental and not for profit as a rival to government education, with strong guarantees from an effective quality-control system. If it were possible to breathe life into private non-profit work through civil society organisations, the latter would find ample opportunities in this field.

Because basic education is the entry point for lifelong learning and the primary path to building an essential human capability, namely, knowledge, the Report team proposes several steps for ensuring basic education for girls.

Strategic measures for ending the denial of basic education to girls

The following measures could be considered as priorities:

- provision of good schools designed to cater to the needs of young girls and located at an accessible distance in all residential areas of the country;
- imposition of basic education free of cost without omissions or excuses;
- removal of financial barriers to the establishment in local communities of schools that are open to girls throughout the educational process;
- confrontation of traditions and social trends that impede girls' education, especially non-registration of girls' births and early marriage (the negative medical and social impacts of which are well known);
- reinforcement of the social return on education by providing specific advantages in terms of public services for educated people, in particular females;
- elimination of any bias against females in the curricula, books, teaching methods and educational management of schools;
- elimination of all forms of mistreatment, by beating or in any other form, in all schools, especially for girls;
- introduction of a sound sexual education for both sexes at a preparatory stage to enable youth to reach sexual maturity safely and to avoid the dangers of sexual ignorance or of obtaining incorrect information from unreliable sources;
- mobilisation, in alliance with the state, the private sector and families, of civil efforts that have proved their seriousness in the field of education for the provision of a high-quality education that is friendly to girls;
- boosting economic returns on education through the inclusion in educational programmes of training that qualifies students for good professions in demand in the labour market and that provides excellent life skills;
- provision of special incentives for girls who have chosen the path of education (good job opportunities, material and intangible incentives, promotion of cases of success in the media) and for their families, at all levels, from the local to the national; and
- incorporation of local and individual features of communities into plans to confront the denial of education to girls.

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Basic education is the entry point for lifelong learning.

Improvement of the social context of girls' education

Societies can take steps extending beyond the education system that can help to eliminate the denial of basic education to girls. Among the most important are:

- insisting on the registration of births, especially of females, as previously indicated;
- raising the age of marriage for girls to 18 years and ensuring that this requirement is observed;
- taking measures to counter the unemployment of educated people and to confront discrimination against females in employment and in worker dismissals;
- improving working conditions for educated people (raising the real value of wages); and
- combating poverty, notably through income-generating projects that target families with school-age children. (Families with school-age children, especially girls and in particular those not attending school, could be given preference for project loans, subject to their children's enrolment and continuance in school).

Ending the denial of basic education to girls is only the first step – albeit a defining one – on the road to building women's capabilities. The completion of this initial step will be crowned by the adoption, at all stages and in all types of education, especially those that prepare women for the professions and equality with men in society, of methods similar to those proposed here for providing basic education for girls.

SECOND: BREAKING DOWN STUBBORN OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S USE OF THEIR CAPABILITIES AS THEY SEE FIT

Although the development of women's basic human capabilities is an essential condition for their advancement, it is clearly insufficient. In previous chapters, it was indicated that women's capacities are held back by a number of cultural and social factors, as evidenced by the unemployment of educated women in some Arab countries.

Opening the economic sphere for women

when they themselves choose to go beyond the family thus heads the list of reforms for achieving their economic independence, itself a critical condition for their "empowerment". This strategic requirement entails a package of societal reforms, particularly in the economic field, which would broadly include the following:

- accelerating the rate of economic growth to enable the creation of employment opportunities on a large scale. The significant increase in the price of oil over the last few years constitutes a revenue source that may enable Arab economies to develop and diversify their productive infrastructure. This is a critical prospect that Arab countries must not lose. Creating the opportunities for the optimum employment of women's capabilities through economic growth requires attention not only to the level of development but more importantly to the form of this development. This also applies to the type of technology used, which should be labour-intensive while ensuring the enhancement of productivity.

It is important to underline that employing women's capabilities can positively contribute to the improvement of productivity. Acquiring the means of knowledge is one of the most important determinants of productivity. As evidence presented in earlier chapter shows, girls are capable of a higher level of academic achievement than boys. Interestingly enough, the Report's field survey indicated that the majority of the public believes that women do not achieve less than men as employees.

- resisting the cultural obstacles to women's use of their full capacities in all areas of human development as freely chosen by them;
- guaranteeing, through constitutions and legislation and through the institutional mechanisms for their implementation, equality of employment opportunities for all regardless of gender;
- guaranteeing women's enjoyment of working conditions consistent with human dignity and, when necessary, providing forms of positive discrimination, protective of their family roles, without making them pay for this preferential treatment by

Opening the economic sphere for women when they themselves choose to go beyond the family thus heads the list of reforms for achieving their economic independence, itself a critical condition for their "empowerment".

decreasing their work privileges vis-à-vis men. This may require that the society/state bear some of the subsequent economic costs while protecting women's rights. This implies, for instance, that the state should bear the costs of day care and maternity leave for women employees. Moreover, private-sector enterprises that use women's

capabilities should be given incentives such as tax concessions; and

- building the mechanisms of an efficient, and modern labour market both at the regional and the national level, open equally to both women and men.

CONCLUSION

This fourth volume brings to an end the first cycle of Arab Human Development Reports. This series has put forward a comprehensive conception of how a human renaissance in the Arab world may be achieved through the elimination of the region's three deficits: in freedom, knowledge and the empowerment of women.

The vision offered here, and in the earlier editions, is no more than intellectual grist for the forces of renewal in the Arab countries in their efforts to formulate mutually supportive projects across the Arab world. It is hoped that these projects will come together to form a historic initiative to bring the region out of the twilight in which it currently languishes and allow all its peoples to develop and achieve the full blossoming of their potential and a better future for all.

It is also fervently hoped that this historic transformation will be carried out under the preferred future scenario: by taking the path of a complete and vibrant human renaissance (*izdihar*) (AHDR 2004) based on a peaceful process of negotiation for redistributing power and building a system of good institutional governance. The first act of this scenario should begin with the institutionalisation of respect for the key freedoms of opinion, expression and association, the last being crucial. This should lead to the creation of a dynamic, effective civil society as the vanguard of a peaceful process of negotiation that will avoid the "impending disaster" scenario of which the Report has warned and whose dark clouds, sadly, are gathering in more than one key Arab country at this time.

