

## ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

# Despite lingering bias, women in Arab states move closer to legal equality

## ***Family and labour law are advancing, but other legislation remains discriminatory, contends new Arab Human Development Report***

Arab countries have made notable progress toward gender equality under the law, and Arab public opinion firmly supports equal rights, but many provisions of national legislation in Arab states still discriminate against women, says the *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World*.

“The business of writing the law, applying the law and interpreting the law in the Arab world is governed above all by a male-oriented culture,” say the Report’s authors.

By codifying equal status for women, the Report argues, the region’s leaders would strengthen Arab society and allow its states to reach higher levels of human development. Women’s rights, the Report asserts, are an integral part of human rights.

“For equality between men and women to exist, it is not enough to incorporate the principle into law,” the Report stresses, “especially with a legal culture or awareness that is overtly or tacitly opposed to equality between the sexes.” Awareness of gender equality among legislators, judges, lawyers—and indeed, broader society—is a prerequisite toward equal legal rights for women, according to the authors of the Report

The *Arab Human Development Report 2005* makes clear that the constitutions of most Arab States provide a firm basis for the elimination of gender bias, both in affirming the principle of equality in general, and the principle of equality between men and women in particular, while respecting gender differences.

Unfortunately, the Report argues, in some areas of law, legislators have so emphasized the principle of gender differences that they have codified gender discrimination: “Clearly, respect for gender differences in law is commendable only insofar as it does not give rise to discriminatory legislation incompatible with the values and spirit of the age.”

## **Labour Law**

Labour laws in Arab countries are also showing signs of progress, the Report says, with many states guaranteeing women the right to maternity leave, prohibiting the dismissal or termination of service of working women during maternity leave or pregnancy, and guaranteeing them the right to child-care leave and to a period for nursing infants. Jordanian labour law provides a male or female worker the right to take extended leave in order to accompany his or her spouse if the spouse has moved to a new workplace located in another province or abroad.

But laws in many Arab states still penalise women who leave the home to work without their husbands' consent. Libyan labour law prohibits the employment of women in work that does not suit "their nature," the Report explains, and Saudi Arabia has severe restrictions on women's right to work: "A royal decree of 1985 prohibits women from employment in all fields of work apart from female education and nursing. It also prohibits women from associating with men in the workplace."

Some states explicitly provide for equal pay for the same job (as is the case with Iraq, Kuwait, Libya and Syria, for example), others have no legal provision for this at all (Bahrain), and yet others stipulate equality in remuneration only in the civil-service sector (Qatar and Saudi Arabia). Some Arab nations forbid women to work at night. These restrictions unfairly deny women full opportunity to participate in all types of activity outside the family on an equal footing with men, the Report asserts.

## **Gender Bias in 'Personal Status' Law**

Most discrimination is found in personal status laws, which the Report contends are permeated by "legally sanctioned gender bias." Arab personal-status laws in many cases ordain wifely obedience, give only husbands the ability to dictate divorce, and grant men the right to the compulsory return of their wives in the event of a revocable divorce.

Indeed, personal-status laws in most of the Arab world remain heavily biased against women. Polygamy in Kuwait, for example, is unrestricted for men, apart from the provision that "a man may not marry a fifth wife until he dissolves his marriage with one of his four wives and the divorced wife's *idda* (stipulated waiting period until she can marry) has elapsed." Kuwaiti law defines divorce as the dissolution of a legitimate marriage contract at the behest of a husband or someone acting on his behalf through the utterance of a specific formula.

The Report praises the steps that some countries have taken to modernise family law. In Tunisia and Morocco, for example, men must now officially inform their first wives if they intend to take a second wife, and men must provide acceptable grounds for taking an additional wife. Legislators have also established the right of the wife to demand a divorce on the grounds of personal injury if her husband takes a second wife, and her right to forced divorce, *khul'*, thereby balancing the spouses' rights to end the marriage.

Personal-status laws in the Maghreb—Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia—are "more progressive and less discriminatory" than those in the rest of the Arab world, the Report points out. The Maghreb states, particularly Tunisia, have made significant inroads in "alleviating the injustices against women in personal status matters without infringing upon the principles of shari'a (Islamic laws)"

## **Penal and Political Codes**

Arab penal codes and criminal procedures tend to treat women as a symbol of honour and virtue, as objects that need to be protected for their childbearing function, or as part of a family unit that needs to be safeguarded

against desertion and neglect. Judges in Arab criminal courts often use their discretionary authority to impose sentences that reflect gender bias, the Report says, punishing female defendants more harshly or showing lenience in cases in which men are accused of crimes against women.

National legislation in all Arab countries that hold elections, except for Saudi Arabia, contains provisions guaranteeing women's political rights and stipulating the principle of gender equality in the exercise of the right to participate in electoral processes and to stand for public elections, says the Report. "Nevertheless, despite these constitutional and legislative guarantees of women's right to political participation, the actual extent of this participation is still minuscule," the Report says. The Report calls on the Arab states to emulate the example of the North African Arab countries which have adopted quota systems to ensure a significant representation of women in their parliaments.

### **Treaty Guarantees against Discrimination**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides an international standard for ending gender bias. Seventeen of the 21 Arab countries have signed and ratified the Convention, but with many conditions and reservations attached, mostly associated with conflicts with national laws or the provisions of shari'a, which strip the treaty of its meaning, the Report contends. The Report calls on states to "take the initiative in reconsidering their reservations." Indeed, "[I]n a number of Arab States and at the urging of civil society and some national institutions, legislative reviews are under way to reconsider the State's stand on reservations. This positive move deserves to be encouraged," the Report notes.

The Arab public is largely unaware of the Convention and its implications for equality under the law. But those citizens who are aware of it strongly favour its implementation throughout the Arab world, 60% of Egyptians and over 70% of Lebanese backing that view, according to polls conducted for the Report. Other polls, on subjects such as women's right to initiate divorce, their right to take positions of power, and other rights of self-determination and sufficiency, overwhelmingly affirm the belief among the Arab public that women deserve equal treatment in the legal structures of their countries.

For more AHDR information please visit [www.undp.org/arabstates](http://www.undp.org/arabstates)

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## ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

# Women are making gains, but still not realizing full potential in contributing to prosperity and strength of Arab States, says new Arab Human Development Report

## *Report cites partial progress toward gender equality, calls for wider and deeper change*

Women in the Arab world are not realizing their full potential and are still denied equality of opportunity, says the *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the rise of women in the Arab world*, arguing that this represents not just a problem for women, but a barrier to progress and prosperity in Arab societies as a whole.

The Report commends some Arab states for “significant, progressive changes” in addressing the fundamental gender biases prevalent in the region. Yet the authors cite a range of obstacles to equitable development, from cosmetic reforms with little real effect to violent conflict, foreign occupations and terrorism, which cast a shadow over the tantalizing hints of progress glimpsed in the Report’s pages.

In 2002, the first Arab Human Development Report identified women’s disempowerment as one of three critical deficits crippling Arab nations in their quest to return to the first rank of world leaders of commerce, learning and culture. Now, four years later, the unequivocal necessity of securing for Arab women a fair chance to thrive has reached primacy as a precondition for development.

“Human development requires more than economic growth alone. The fight against poverty is not a campaign of charity - it is a mission of empowerment. This is especially true as regards women, given that, of the world’s one billion poorest people, three-fifths are women and girls. Full participation and empowerment of women, as citizens, as producers, as mothers and sisters, will be a source of strength for Arab Nations and will allow the Arab World to reach greater prosperity, greater influence and higher levels of human development,” said United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Kemal Derviş. UNDP sponsored the Report.

This final report in the four-part series examines the situation of women in the region, with a special emphasis on health, education, and political participation. The 2005 Report also assesses the advancement of women by analysing Arab society’s desire for such progress, and the kinds of social action that are needed to achieve the goal of gender equality in the Arab states.

“To embrace the courage and activism of women in the Arab world is to champion the catalysts of human development. Hard-won gains in women’s rights are the culmination of decades of committed engagement by generations of women’s rights campaigners and their allies in Governments across the region,” said Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Arab States.

The Report asserts that despite Arab women’s equal status under international law, their demonstrated talents and achievements in different spheres of human activity, and their priceless contributions to their families and society, many are not encouraged to develop and use their capabilities on an equal footing with men. In public life, cultural, legal, social, economic and political factors impede women’s equal access to education, health, job opportunities, citizens’ rights and representation, the Report contends. In private life, the Report says, traditional patterns of upbringing and discriminatory family and personal-status laws perpetuate inequality and subordination.

At the level of culture, the Report maintains, the fundamental obstacle to the rise of women remains how to deal with certain conflicts between the requirement of a productive economy and internationally agreed standards on the one hand and traditions and customs on the other.

The Report contends that the strongest inhibitors of development for many Arab citizens, women and men, have been foreign occupations and the ‘war on terror.’ “Women have endured a double portion of suffering under foreign occupation,” the Report says, and in many cases, the basic rights and freedoms of Arab citizens, extending from the right to life through civil and political rights to economic and social rights, have continued to be violated.

This negative environment—in conjunction with the spectre of extremist terrorism, which the Report condemns in the strongest possible terms—damages the prospects for a broad revival in the Arab world by impeding reform and obstructing opportunities for peaceful and just solutions to the occupation of Arab lands and the restriction of Arab freedoms and rights. A continued impasse over these matters, the Report argues, may push the region further towards extremism and violent protest in the absence of a fair system of governance at the global level that ensures security and prosperity for all.

However, the Report affirms, some achievements have been secured; most Arab countries now have a parliament, a cabinet or a local council in whose assigned tasks at least one woman participates effectively.

Still, the Report warns that political reform, at every level, must go beyond the cosmetic and the symbolic: “In all cases...real decisions in the Arab world are, at all levels, in the hands of men.”

Islamic movements, often characterized in the West as uniformly malevolent forces, have, the Report contends, in reality been in many cases at the vanguard of women’s empowerment. “In the last five decades, the internal dynamics of these movements, their relationship to mainstream society and their positions on vital societal issues, on human rights and on good governance and democracy have undergone significant, progressive changes,” the Report explains.

Most of the mainstream Islamic movements, according to the AHDR, are witnessing notable growth of an enlightened leadership among their relatively younger generations. In addition, there is a growing grass-roots mandate for greater internal democracy, the Report says. However, these positive developments have not canceled out other currents outside mainstream Arab society that could seek to curtail freedom and democracy if they came to power, especially with regard to women.

Another reason for optimism can be found in the results of the public-opinion polls commissioned for the Report. The polls reveal a broad desire for a level of gender equality higher than that found today, and certainly higher than that which will result if societal obstacles to the rise of Arab women remain in place.

The Report affirms that a transformation is taking place in the Arab world, as women's issues are increasingly permeating intellectual and cultural discourse: "Contemporary media forms such as the Internet, chat rooms, satellite television channels and their specialised programmes are based on the power of open public dialogue, quick communication and accessible communities of thought and practice. For women, they open up a new avenue of liberation that allows them to occupy spaces that they could not have entered through the conventional print media."

Still, the modern Arab women's movement is too often misconstrued as an import from the West; in reality, the concept of gender equality has deep roots in the region. Egypt's first "women's educational society" was founded in 1881, with raising public awareness of women's rights as a key objective. The 1940s, under colonialism, saw a surge in women's organizations, most of which dedicated themselves to issues like polygamy and women's right to education.

The Arab Human Development Report 2005 concludes that the rise of women in the Arab world requires, first, that all Arab women be afforded full opportunities to acquire essential health, and knowledge on an equal footing with male counterparts. Second, "full opportunities must be given to Arab women to participate as they see fit in all types of human activity outside the family on an equal footing with men."

In line with the calls in previous reports for comprehensive, rights-based societal reforms, the AHDR asserts that the rise of Arab women entails:

- Total respect for the rights of citizenship of all Arab women.
- The protection of women's rights in the area of personal affairs and family relations.
- Guarantees of total respect for women's personal rights and freedoms.

In addition, the Report calls for the temporary adoption of affirmative action in expanding the participation of Arab women to all fields of human activity. This will allow the dismantling of the centuries-old structures of discrimination against women.

The Report maintains that the rise of women requires a wide and effective movement in Arab civil society aimed at achieving human development for all. Such a movement, the Report asserts, will be the means by which Arab women may empower themselves and their male supporters. It will have two levels. The first is national and will involve all levels of society in every country. The second is regional and will be founded on trans-border networks for co-ordination and support of regional efforts to empower women.

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## ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

*"The Arab Human Development Reports have become a strategic blueprint for UNDP programming in the Arab States region, informing development projects that are rooted in the region's priorities, capacities, and objectives."*

*Amat Al Alim Alsoswa, Regional Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States*

### The AHDR Series: Impact on the Ground

The first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2002, *Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*, defined three deficits in knowledge, freedom, and women's empowerment impeding the human development of the Arab region. The AHDR series has become a milestone in the broader debate over the development reform agenda in the Arab region, with AHDR recommendations increasingly reflected in development programming at the national and regional levels.

To further encourage the development of AHDR-informed programming at the national-level, an AHDR Trust Fund was established in 2003 with contributions from Denmark and the United Kingdom. At Present, national AHDR projects are carried out in Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Bahrain, Somalia, Syria and Morocco.

## I. KNOWLEDGE

*"Without a strong and growing contemporary knowledge base of their own, Arab countries will be absorbed into the international knowledge society as passive consumers of other countries' proprietary knowledge, technology and services."*

*Arab Human Development Report 2003*

### A. Regional initiatives to build knowledge societies

The AHDR series identified knowledge as a cornerstone of human development: a means of expanding people's capabilities and a tool for overcoming human poverty. Towards this goal, UNDP has launched a number of regional programmes to promote information and communication technology for development (ICTD), enhance educational quality assurance at the primary, secondary and higher education levels, and support longer-term capacity building in the region through the establishment of regional mechanisms.

**Information & Communication Technology for Development in the Arab Region (ICTDAR)**, is a regional programme based in Cairo that assists Arab States to harness information and communication technology in the fight against poverty and the improvement of their public administration performance and private sector expansion. Established in 2003, ICTDAR promotes advocacy and awareness-raising, assists its partners with campaign development and participation, and helps advance capacity development, pro-poor growth and employment generation. Specific projects include:

- ❖ **Ajialcom:** In partnership with Microsoft, ICTDAR has trained more than 10,000 youth in ICT, and established 60 Access Centres in Morocco, Egypt, Algeria and Yemen, while upgrading 500 additional Centers across the region.
- ❖ **MASHROATI:** Also in partnership with Microsoft, ICTDAR set up a Center of Excellence in Morocco, which provides technical training, consulting services, and knowledge sharing platforms to small and medium enterprises. The initiative will soon be replicated in Syria and Somalia.
- ❖ **WRACTI:** In partnership with Microsoft and the European Union, **WRCATI** is a women's empowerment initiative that promotes ICT as a tool to educate women on their rights, and the rights of their children. In Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia, 3000 CD ROMS containing legal information on women's rights and entitlements have been distributed, and more than 300 persons have been trained on the use of ICT and the content of the CD ROMS.
- ❖ **The Regional E-Government Institute in the Arab Region (REGI):** To be launched in Amman, Jordan in 2007, REGI will provide policy-relevant research and advice on the application of e-government and e-governance in the Arab States region.

**Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)** is a global methodology developed for comparative assessments of education performance in math and science at the primary and secondary levels. TIMSS surveys have led to extensive educational reforms in curriculum, evaluation, teaching and assessment standards in numerous Arab states. Yemen's participation for example, resulted in the standardization of scoring methodology, and a re-examination of the style and content of tests. Egypt similarly introduced TIMSS style testing formats, while adopting new teaching methodologies focusing on enhanced classroom interaction between students and teachers.

**Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning in Arab Universities** is a UNDP regional programme that assists public and private Arab universities to adopt international instruments of quality assurance through the evaluation of programmes, the assessment of student performance, and the establishment of comparable statistical databases of participating universities. During the first cycle (2002-2003), computer science programmes were evaluated at 15 participating universities in 11 countries. During the second cycle (2003-2004), business administration programmes were evaluated at 16 universities in 11 countries. Twenty four universities from 13 Arab countries are now participating in the third cycle of the programme focused on the field of education. The project has produced the first Arab cohort of qualified quality assurance reviewers training over 60 representatives in all stages of the review process. Over 50 individualized programme review reports have been sent to all participating universities, while overview reports presenting regional trends in computer science, business and education have also been published. With combined Finnish and German partnership and co-sponsorship, UNDP established the first Arab Regional Quality Assurance Agency (ARQAA) to develop and implement common methods and standards of quality assurance.

## **B. Country level initiatives**

### **Bahrain: *Building a knowledge society***

Building on national economic, labor and education reforms, UNDP has provided the Government with policy recommendations and alternative models for economic growth and productivity in the Kingdom. A UNDP study surveyed relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the private and public sector, policy makers, research centers, and civil society, as well as experts on knowledge-based societies.

### **Egypt: *Aligning national and regional higher education strategies***

Utilizing research methodologies and technical from the UNDP Higher Education Project, UNDP's Country Office in Egypt has began assisting the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education with the establishment of a research management unit at the national level, and conduct socio-economic surveys of various governerates to ensure alignment between higher education strategies and sub-regional needs.

**Jordan: *Assessment of gaps between knowledge skills and labour market demands***

UNDP provided the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research with recommendations on bridging the gaps between knowledge skills acquired through higher education training and labour market demands. Recommendations called for improving the current accreditation system for universities, and strengthening on-the-job training mechanisms and Information Technology and Business Administration degrees.

**Saudi Arabia: *Modernizing the public sector***

In partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNDP has established an e-Visa programme to improve Foreign Ministry's ability to process visas and coordinate issuance procedures for the five to six million pilgrims traveling annually to Saudi Arabia to participate in the Hajj ceremony. UNDP and Hewlett-Packard (HP) have documented the implementation of e-Visa programmes in Armenia and Saudi Arabia in a new publication, "Virtual Consulate Primer: How to design and implement an e-Visa programme."

**Syria: *Upgrading Business Administration Programs in Syrian universities***

In response to the outcomes of the evaluation of the quality of Business Administration programs at Aleppo University, as identified by UNDP/RBAS's regional project "Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning at Arab Universities," UNDP Syria in partnership with the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education, is addressing some of the problems and weaknesses outlined in the Report. A pilot project seeks, with the technical assistance and support of the regional Higher Education project, to develop a detailed model for upgrading Business Administration Programs in Syrian universities.

**Yemen: *Strengthening Human Rights Knowledge***

UNDP conducted a baseline survey to provide an over-all assessment of the status of Human Rights education in seven public universities and three private universities. A follow-up committee, chaired by UNESCO, has been delegated the task of rolling out the survey's recommendations for the inclusion of human rights in the curricula of learning institutions. The country's first Human Rights Information Centre was inaugurated in Sana'a in January 2006, followed by the opening of a second Centre in Aden in April 2006. The first issue of the Yemen Journal of Human Rights was published in March 2006, alongside the launch of a virtual human rights library in an effort to enhance skills in HR research and communication.

## II. GOVERNANCE

*"Governance in Arab countries is undergoing a process of reform. We hope that these Reports will help to plant the seeds of good governance in the region by inspiring a society-wide process of creative thinking, innovation and collective work in which all dynamic societal forces in Arab countries will take part."*  
*Arab Human Development Report 2004*

### A. Regional initiatives to promote Good Governance

**The Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR)** works to advance four pillars of good governance practice: (1) Rule of Law; (2) Transparency and Accountability; (3) Participation; and (4) Human Rights. POGAR's activities range from capacity building and knowledge generation to policy advice and dialogue, creating strategic partnerships among government officials, civil society organizations, academics and donor agencies. In response to AHDR 2002, POGAR constructed comprehensive legal databases in Arabic

(Egypt, Iraq, Arab banking laws); translated, commissioned and published several studies on governance-related issues; and launched its own website ([www.undp-pogar.org](http://www.undp-pogar.org)), which provides resources on governance reform in Arab countries.

Other POGAR activities include:

- ***Project on the Modernization of the Public Prosecution Offices:*** Modernized public prosecution offices in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Yemen.
- ***Elections and Electoral Processes:*** Assessed latest electoral experiences in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.
- ***Gender and Citizenship Initiative:*** Worked in partnership with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to build knowledge on women's citizenship rights in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and the occupied Palestinian territory.
- ***Good Governance for Development:*** Worked in partnership with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to strengthen public governance reform.

## **B. Country level initiatives to promote good governance**

### **Lebanon: *Towards a National Dialogue on Corruption***

UNDP produced a survey of anti-corruption initiatives in Lebanon mapping out efforts over the past decade to combat corruption. A subsequent Advisory Group was formed representing various stakeholders including public and private sectors, NGOs, parliamentarians and judges, media, and academics in order to assist in developing an action plan. The project is implemented in partnership with Transparency International's local chapter, La Fassad.

### **Occupied Palestinian territory (OPT): *Supporting free and fair elections***

UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP) played a leading role in the establishment of the Central Elections Commission, an independent electoral entity responsible for the administration and supervision of Palestinian municipal, legislative and presidential elections. PAPP has since provided extensive technical support and guidance, including selecting, funding and facilitating the work of election monitors.

### **Sudan: *Security Sector Reform and the Rule of Law***

In partnership with the International Rescue Committee and the People's Legal Aid Centre (PLACE), UNDP has trained over 1500 law-enforcement, judiciary and security officials on basic human rights and their obligations to protect affected populations with the objective of building confidence between IDP (internationally displaced) communities and local authorities.

## **III. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

*"This Report... 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."*

*Arab Human Development Report (2005)*

### **A. Regional initiatives to advance women's empowerment**

**Center for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR)** - Based in Tunis, CAWTAR is an independent regional institution that promotes gender equality in the Arab World through research, training, networking and advocacy. Originally supported as a joint project of UNDP, AGFUND, and later the World Bank, CAWTAR

has produced *Arab Women Development Reports* since 2001. The AWDRs are a series of thematic periodical reports whose primary objective is to address the knowledge gap in gender-related research in the Arab region.

**HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States (HARPAS)** – Based in Cairo, HARPAS works to heighten awareness and to build commitment and leadership in the regional response to HIV/AIDS. In May 2006, HARPAS launched a Regional Women Religious Leaders Forum in Cairo, Egypt that culminated in the Tripoli Declaration. The Declaration commits religious communities to advocate for an end to discrimination, and to protect women and children infected, and affected, by the HIV virus.

## **B. Country level initiatives to advance women's empowerment**

### ***Algeria: Strengthening women's political participation***

An International Forum of Women Parliamentarians, organized jointly by the Algerian Parliament, UNDP and the Inter-Parliamentary Union was held in June 2006. The Forum brought together women MPs from Algeria, Belgium, Egypt, France, Jordan, Morocco, Spain and Tunisia, to discuss the role of women in politics and ways and means of strengthening women's involvement in political life.

### ***Bahrain: Supporting the electoral campaigns of woman candidates***

UNDP Bahrain is technically and financially supporting the electoral campaigns of 23 female candidates in the November 2006 parliamentary and municipal elections. In accordance with article four of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW), UNDP has conducted a series of training and capacity building workshops.

### ***Djibouti: Gender as a key to the Millennium Development Goals***

In preparation for Djibouti's first national 2005 human development report (NHDRS) exclusively dedicated to Gender as a key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, UNDP launched a "Caravan on Human Development," which traveled to rural villages to introduce the theme of the forthcoming NHDR. Feedback from communities enabled the report to reflect local concerns, while students were encouraged to enter a drawing competition for the Report's cover illustration.

### ***Iraq: Advancing the National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women***

UNDP plays an instrumental role in the formulation and implementation of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women, for which an initial assessment of the situation of Iraqi women was conducted in 2003. The first national symposium of Iraqi women, organized by Iraq's Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) in close collaboration with UNIFEM, was convened in 2004. More than 500 participants took part in discussions over the draft National Strategy, currently in development.

### ***Kuwait: Public Awareness of women's and youth's political participation***

In cooperation with civil society organizations, UNDP launched public awareness and media campaigns in support of women's political participation in their first parliamentary elections. UNDP also collaborated with the Kuwait Transparency Society and the Kuwait Youth Forum to publish and distribute a Youth Guide to the elections, to encourage the latter's political participation.

### ***Morocco: Promotion of women's entrepreneurial activities in Morocco***

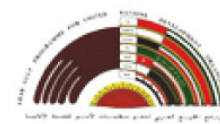
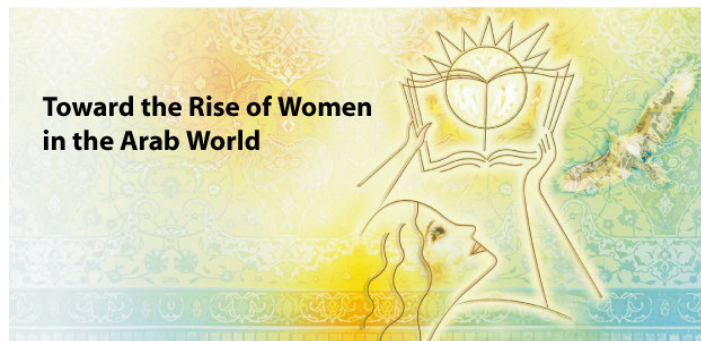
In close partnership with UNIFEM, UNDP established regional investment centres to promote women's economic empowerment and address the needs of women.

### ***Somalia: Enhancing Women's Leadership and Governance***

In collaboration with UNIFEM, “*Enhancing Women’s Leadership and Governance*” supports local women’s organizations and women’s ministries to mainstream gender and lobby for equal representation in governance institutions. UNDP also works with three political parties in Somaliland to advocate for a quota system in preparation for the next elections.

***Yemen: Support to the National Committee for the Advancement of Women***

In close consultation with the Ministry of Human Rights and local NGOs, UNDP has produced user-friendly legal information in textual and audio-visual formats, in Arabic, to raise women’s awareness of their basic rights and entitlements. Legal information has been made available on the worldwide web as well distributed through CD-ROMs, telephone hot lines, and accessible at women support centers in rural and urban areas.



## ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

# Women's political participation increasing but still limited, says Arab Human Development Report 2005

### *Quotas bring more women into parliaments, but women's roles in government decision-making remain restricted and cosmetic*

The political process in Arab nations is still far from representative of women and their needs and concerns, but social pressure for women's rights has catalysed some positive changes, says the *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World*.

"The nature of women's participation in government has generally been symbolic, limited to smaller portfolios and conditional," the Report says, and Arab governments enable a few "notable women to occupy leadership positions in the structure of the existing regime without extending empowerment to the broad base of women."

But women have been gaining greater political rights in recent years, the Report notes. Women may now vote in all Arab countries except for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which lack elected legislatures entirely. In 2003 women in Oman and Qatar won the right to vote and to stand for parliamentary office for the first time. And in Kuwait, after decades of debate, women gained full political rights in 2005. These reforms will encourage greater dynamism throughout Arab society, the Report argues.

The Report asserts, however, that despite this progress, women's participation in senior levels of government remains largely cosmetic, with a few women in high-profile positions without much real power. The Report says that "real decisions in the Arab world, at all levels, are in the hands of men." Women's roles, the Report argues, are **symbolic**—one or two female ministers in most cases; **limited** to smaller portfolios like Women's/Social Affairs Ministries; and **conditional**: dependent on internal and external pressures at the time of appointment and subject to the whims of male leaders.

The Report contends that some Arab governments resist empowering women because expanding the participation of women in politics will disperse power more widely throughout society, reducing the dominant current leaders. Quotas for female representation in political institutions, which have led to a significant presence of women into parliaments in Iraq, Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia, should be widely used throughout the Arab world as a first step toward broader equality, the authors recommend. By early 2006, women held 25.5 percent of the seats in Iraq's parliament, while in Tunisia's last elections in 2004 women claimed 23 per cent of the seats. In Morocco, the percentage of women in parliament jumped from 1% in 1995 to 11% in 2003; in the same eight-year period in Jordan it went from 2.5% to 5.5%, while in Tunisia, women's representation in the legislature rose from 6.8% to 11.5%.

The women's movement in the Arab world long predates globalisation and Western pressure for reform, the Report notes. Pioneers such as Huda Sha'rawi, who founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923, set off something of a social revolution in Egypt and other Arab countries, while a number of women's movements emerged in Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan and Jordan in the early 1940s. Arab women such as Djamila Bouhired and A'isha Bilagha were symbols of the fight for independence of Algeria and Tunisia, respectively, and Palestinian women are to this day deeply involved in their continuing struggle for independence.

But pressure for the greater inclusion of women in the political process has increasingly come from Western governments and international organizations, producing changes that have often been more symbolic than substantive, the authors say. Arab governments accepted the formal incorporation of women into political life on condition that they remain "a mute, motionless presence," the Report contends.

And for many Arab rulers, the issue of women's political rights became a type of "democratic façade," the Report argues further, offering an "easily manipulated symbol for countries that wanted to escape political criticism of their undemocratic conditions at a time when human rights reports and reports on women's affairs were pressing for change." In addition, external pressures for change weakened local advocates of women's rights by earning them the label of "Western sympathizers" during a time of acute anti-Western sentiment across the Arab world.

Still, the Report argues, the rise of women in the Arab world is mainly hindered by the two dominant forces inside Arab states.

The first, the Report asserts, are the autocratic secular regimes, who since the establishment of the Arab nation-state have manipulated women's issues depending on their political interest at the time.

The second is the rise of Islamic movements in the Arab world. The *Arab Human Development Report* says that the Islamists' true difficulty with women is not linked only to their discourse and conservative view of women's place in society, but to their broader ideology: "The challenge before the Islamists' vision of women is how to develop an Islamic alternative that can coexist with differing or opposing trends and advance women's position forcefully in discourse and practice not as a result of, but as one of the conditions for, building the Islamic society that they desire."

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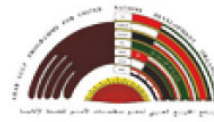
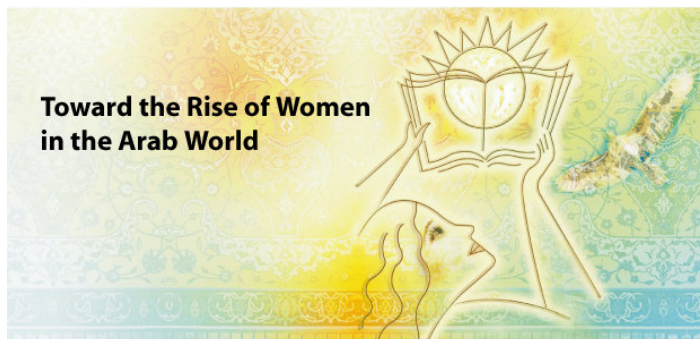
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## ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

# Women in Arab States strive to overcome bias-induced knowledge gap

*Girls outperform boys in schools when given opportunities, says Arab Human Development Report 2005*

Women in Arab countries cannot achieve equal status without the elimination of a profound knowledge deficit resulting from deep inequality between the sexes in both access to and the quality of education, says the *Arab Human Development Report 2005*.

“Despite the tremendous spread of girls’ education in Arab countries in the last five decades, Arab women remain poorly prepared to participate effectively and fruitfully in public life by acquiring knowledge through education,” the Report contends.

Even amid signs of progress like increasing enrolment rates and better test scores for women, the Report points out that the Arab world remains in the lower ranks internationally in the education of women, especially at the higher levels of schooling.

This deficit in education is a major factor in preventing women in the region from realising their full potential, harming society as a whole, the authors say.

The Report, entitled *Towards the rise of women in the Arab world*, further argues that progress in education would catalyse broader societal changes in the region: “The release of Arab girls’ and women’s captive energies in the fields of knowledge and creativity through the creation of a familial and societal environment that rewards high achievement regardless of gender, would be the freshest sign of spring in the blossoming (*izdihar*) of the Arab world.”

Fewer than 80 percent of girls attend secondary schools in all Arab nations except for four, and women’s participation in college education trails only South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Report points out. Women in Arab states who do make it to university largely concentrate in

literature, humanities and social sciences, fields that don't often lead to significant opportunity in the job market. One-half of women are illiterate, compared with one-third of men.

The Report, sponsored by UNDP, points out that great differences exist between Arab countries in giving women access to knowledge. The school enrolment rate of girls in several Arab oil-producing countries and in Jordan, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory and Tunisia is in fact higher than that of boys, the Report says, while the highest relative rate of deprivation of education occurs in the less-developed Arab countries, such as Djibouti and Yemen, and in those with the largest populations, such as Egypt, Morocco and Sudan.

Still, the Report celebrates the signs of progress in women's learning in the Arab world. Data show that equality between the sexes in higher education has been achieved in twelve Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, the occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia). Enrolment of girls in primary school is at least 90 percent that of boys in all Arab states except the Comoros, Morocco and Yemen. And government efforts to close the gender gap in education have borne fruit: In the occupied Palestinian territory, for example, the rate of girls in applied skills training rose from 38.9 percent in 1995 to 45.1 percent in 1999, when more schools near their homes were opened to girls. These hints of progress signal the substantial latent power in the Arab world, as yet untapped as a source of broader freedom in all areas of society, the Report says.

Deep deficits remain, though, and those deficits begin at the early stages of child development, for boys as well as girls: According to UNESCO data, the Arab child on average is provided with 0.4 years of pre-schooling, compared to 1.6 years in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1.8 years in Central and Eastern Europe and 2.2 years in North America and Western Europe. The Report says that "in general, most countries of the region fail to give the necessary priority to this level of education. For the most part, reliance is placed on for-profit private institutions or women's organisations, indicating a belief that the support of small children is considered basically a women's issue and not a public priority."

The Report points out that at many levels of education the teaching material itself is infected with gender bias. Images and constructs in the curricula invariably confine a woman to the roles of mother, homemaker and housekeeper. Most set texts in Arab schools, the Report reveals, limit women to a specific context, usually domestic. The illustrations used in school curricula reveal this bias graphically. Rarely do education-ministry textbooks show a female reading a book or sitting in a library; the only place where she needs to be, in these books, is in the kitchen or the fields.

But when given the chance to learn, Arab women often distinguish themselves: "Dropout rates for girls are lower than those for boys in all the countries for which data are available with the exception of the United Arab Emirates ... The percentage of girls repeating a year is lower than that of boys in the countries of the region for which data are available with the exception of the Sudan," the Report says.

In fact, the Report continues, "Girls' share among top scorers in all Arab countries where data are available is over 50 per cent. The fact that, on average, girls make up less than half the total enrolment in education serves to confirm their higher level of academic achievement. Noticeable, too, is the higher level of academic achievement of girls in a wide variety of circumstances, in rich and

poor Arab countries alike and under the most obstructive of military occupations, underscoring the intrinsic, non-circumstantial nature of their success.”

The Report takes special note of the field of astronomy as one area in which Arab women have shined especially brightly: “Astronomy and the space sciences have sparked the interest of women scientists from the Arab East to the Arab West and from such diverse disciplines as physics, mathematics, geology and geography. Four of these women have ascended the arduous path of astrophysics, a branch of science that emerged from the fusion of astronomy and physics.” Like most prominent Arab women in the sciences, three of these luminaries, Maha Ashour-Abdalla, Shadia Rifai Habbal and Leila Abdel Haqq Belkoura, graduated from Arab universities before obtaining advanced degrees and conducting research abroad.

In light of achievements like these, the need to eradicate the continuing gender bias in education in Arab countries becomes even more urgent, and the Report thus calls for decisive action: “Discrimination needs to be investigated, brought to a halt and punished.”

Indeed, the Report says that “equality between men and women in the acquisition and use of knowledge would deliver tremendous gains, benefits that would elevate Arab society in all branches of human endeavour.”

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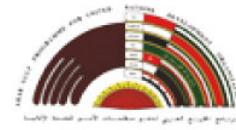
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## ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

# The Arab Human Development Report 2005: Facts and figures

The rise of women in Arab society cannot take place as long as it continues to deny women the opportunity to grow, learn and reach their full potential, a condition that hampers broader human development in the region, says the *Arab Human Development Report 2005*.

“The rise of women is a necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, condition for the realisation of human development. It must be accompanied by extirpating all forms of deprivation among all members of society ... including the denial of opportunities for the acquisition and effective employment of human capabilities.”

Deprivation of women’s freedom to reach the heights of their capacity still prevails in many sectors of the lives of Arab women - denial of civil and political freedoms, knowledge, health, wealth and personal safety. But the Report finds reasons for cautious optimism, too: In the face of overwhelming obstacles, Arab women are in many cases taking determined steps forward.

### *Progress—and obstacles--in education*

- In 2002-03 girls’ enrolment at all levels of education exceeded boys’ in several Arab oil-producing countries and in Jordan, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territories and Tunisia.
- The primary enrolment rate of girls is at least 90 percent that of boys in all Arab States except the Comoros, Morocco and Yemen.
- Government efforts to close the gender gap in education have borne fruit: In the occupied Palestinian Territories, for example, the rate of girls in applied skills training rose from 38.9 percent in 1995 to 45.1 percent in 1999 when more classes near their homes were opened to girls.
- But fewer than 80 percent of girls attend secondary school in all Arab countries except for four: Bahrain, Jordan, the occupied Palestinian territory and Qatar. Female enrolment is less than 20 per cent in Djibouti and Mauritania.
- Girls’ primary net enrolment rate—the number of children of official primary school age who are enrolled in primary education as a percentage of the total children of the official school age population--in 2003 in Arab states was 77%, compared with 89% in Central and Eastern Europe and 96% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Arab countries’ net secondary enrolment rate for girls in 2003 was 54%, compared with 83% in Central and Eastern Europe and 68% in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Women’s gross enrolment rate--the number of students enrolled in a level of education, regardless of age, as a percentage of the population of official school age for that level --in higher education was

significantly less than men's in 2002-03. In this area, the region was ahead of only South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and far behind Central and Eastern Europe Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central Asia.

- More women than men are registered for higher education in Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. But a substantial population of Arab men is enrolled overseas, and most countries provide enrolment data only for local institutions.
- At all levels, the highest relative rate of deprivation of education occurs in the less developed Arab countries, such as Djibouti and Yemen, and in those with the largest populations, such as Egypt, Morocco and Sudan.

### **Political representation**

- Social pressure for women's rights, and some Arab governments' response to it, has catalysed certain positive changes. Quota systems have brought about an influx of women into positions of power: In Iraq, women's representation in parliament reached 25% with the 2005 elections. In Morocco, the percentage of women in parliament rose from 1% in 1995 to 11% in 2003. In Jordan, women's representation climbed from 2.5% in 1995 to 5.5% in 2003. In Tunisia, it rose from 6.8% to 11.5%.
- Women have the vote in all Arab countries except for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which lack elected legislatures.
- After 40 years of struggle, Kuwaiti women gained comprehensive political rights in 2005.
- In 2003 in Oman and Qatar, women were granted the right to vote and to stand for parliamentary office for the first time.
- In December 2004 elections for local councils under the Palestinian Authority, women gained 17% of total seats in the 26 locations where elections were held. Thirty-five of those women defeated men in their races.
- Still, many female political appointees in Arab nations occupy largely symbolic positions, often in the traditional arenas of arts and culture.
- In Bahrain (no parliamentary seats), Yemen (0.3% of seats) and Egypt (2% of seats) women remain gravely underrepresented, and Saudi Arabia excluded women from its first municipal elections in February 2005.

### **Health challenges**

- The rate of births attended by trained personnel exceeded 80 per cent in most Arab countries in recent years, compared with 42% in Kenya and 69% in El Salvador in 2003 and 66% in Indonesia in 2002.
- But women continue to contend with grave challenges in the most basic elements of health. The maternal-mortality rate in Arab countries averages 270 deaths per 100,000 live births, rising to more than 1,000 deaths in the poorest Arab countries, Mauritania and Somalia, and falling to 7 per 100,000 births in Qatar. This compares with 14 per 100,000 births in the U.S. (WHO 2000), 540 per 100,000 in India, 210 per 100,000 in Kazakhstan and 83 per 100,000 in Mexico.
- The average fertility rate in the Arab region is declining but remains high: 3.8 live births per woman of child-bearing age, on average, in 2000-2005, compared with 2.9 live births in the rest of the developing world. The 2004 rate in the Americas was 2.3; in Europe, 1.6.
- The Arab region remains one of those least affected by the HIV/AIDS virus, but Arab women and girls are becoming infected in increasing numbers and now represent half the total number of people carrying the virus in the region. Women are now also at greater risk: The probability of infection among females from 15 to 24 years of age is double that of males in the same age group in the region—a disparity that can be largely attributed to the low level of empowerment of Arab women; the poor quality of health services provided to them; poor monitoring and testing services; and the dearth of information on

methods of protection against the AIDS virus in the prevailing culture of silence surrounding issues of sexual and reproductive health.

### **Victims of violence**

- The murder of women in so-called “defense of honor” is a tribal custom still practiced in several Arab societies.
- Domestic violence remains prevalent in the region. More disturbingly, some Arab societies still deny its existence.
- The common practice of female genital mutilation in some Arab countries has serious implications for both mental and physical health of women.
- Women living under foreign occupation, as well as migrant workers, both Arab and non-Arab are particularly subject to violence – they endure a double portion of suffering.

### **Legal rights**

- Even though most Arab countries, 17 out of 21 have signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), they encumbered the treaty with their many reservations and thus striped it of its substance, the Report maintains. Arab States, the Report says, based their reservations to the provisions of the Convention on one of two grounds: that the articles concerned contradicted national legislation or that they conflicted with the provisions of shari‘a (Islamic law).
- The reservations entered by Arab States were confined to the following articles:
  - Article 2, which stipulates equality before the law and prohibits discrimination against women in national constitutions and legislation (Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Bahrain, Syria, and UAE);
  - Article 9, pertaining to equal nationality rights (Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Algeria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Syria, UAE, and Oman);
  - Article 15, regarding women’s equality with men in their legal capacity in civil matters (Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Bahrain, Syria, UAE, and Oman);
  - Article 16, relating to marriage and family relations (Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Algeria, Lebanon, Bahrain, Syria, UAE, and Oman); and
  - Article 29, pertaining to arbitration between States Parties and the referral of disputes over the interpretation or application of the Convention to the International Court of Justice (Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, Iraq, Morocco, Kuwait, Algeria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Syria, UAE, and Oman).
- To their credit, Arab legislators, and constitutional lawmakers in particular, have respected the principle of gender differences and have tried to regulate the effects of these differences legislatively.
- Arab legislators have at times overreached in their work to end gender bias and, in effect, codified discrimination.
- Arab women now broadly possess the right to stipulate certain conditions in the marriage contract as long as those conditions do not conflict with shari‘a, and legislators have established the right of a wife to retain custody of her children beyond the age at which custody normally passes to the father, if that is deemed in the interests of the children, and to retain the marital home as the custodial dwelling.
- But labour laws, penal codes and nationality laws still harbour gender discrimination. Family laws in many Arab countries, for example, penalise wives who leave their home for work without their husbands’ consent. Libyan labour law prohibits the employment of women in work that does not suit “their nature,” and Saudi Arabia has severe restrictions on women’s right to work. Many labour laws contain provisions that bar women from working at night.

- Labour laws in many Arab states now protect working women. The Jordanian and Egyptian constitutions and labour laws in some other states explicitly prohibit gender discrimination in the workplace. Many states guarantee women the right to maternity leave, ban the dismissal of working women during maternity leave or pregnancy, and guarantee them child-care leave and time for nursing infants. Jordanian labour law gives a male or female worker the right to extended leave to accompany a spouse to a new work location.
- Many Arab states have signed the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, but national legislation in this regard varies considerably. Some states explicitly provide for equal pay for the same job (as is the case with Iraq, Kuwait, Libya and Syria, for example), others have no legal provision for this at all (Bahrain), and yet others stipulate equality in pay only in the civil-service sector (Qatar and Saudi Arabia).
- Personal status codes in Arab countries exhibit wide variation in terms of a progressive approach, mainly between the North African Maghrebi states--Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria--and the rest of the region where glaring inequities remain. In the Maghreb, Tunisia's personal status law is the only Arab personal status code that applies to all the country's citizens regardless of religious affiliation. A woman there has the right to act on her own behalf when entering into marriage even if still a virgin.
- Kuwait provides a contrasting example. Polygamy is unrestricted for men apart from one provision: "A man may not marry a fifth wife until he dissolves his marriage with one of his four wives and the divorced wife's 'idda (stipulated waiting period until she can remarry) has elapsed." Kuwaiti law defines divorce as the dissolution of a legitimate marriage contract at the behest of the husband or a person acting on his behalf through the utterance of a specific formula.
- Arab penal codes often apply different standards to men and women, and judges in Arab criminal courts often use their discretionary authority to adjust sentencing according to the defendant's gender.

### *Economically marginalised*

- Arab women's economic activity rate—defined as the share of the female population ages 15 and above who supply, or are available to supply, labour for the production of goods and services--remains the lowest in the world—33%, compared with 69 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, more than 60% in Sub-Saharan Africa and more than 40% in Latin America and the Caribbean. The world average for women is 56 percent.
- A tight job market, slow job creation and the spread of women's education along with society's irrational preference that men should take what jobs there are have combined to increase unemployment for women, especially educated women.
- In Arab countries, experience shows that in times of economic recession, women are the first fired while in times of economic expansion they are the last hired. This is illustrated by the decline in the number of working women during the first half of the 1990s, a period of slow growth, especially in the private sector, in Egypt while male employment increased in the same period.
- In coming years the pool of women looking for work in Arab countries is expected to grow. The rate of growth in the work force in Arab countries has been estimated at 3.5 per cent per year for the period from 2000 to 2010, while that of the female work force has been estimated at 5 per cent.
- The number of Arab women entrepreneurs is steadily on the rise. In Bahrain, for example, the number of women employers rose from 193 in 1991 to 815 in 2001 – more than 322 percent. In Saudi Arabia, estimates of the number of businesses owned by women range between 20,000 and 40,000 and in Tunisia, the number of woman-owned businesses increased from 2,000 in 1998 to 5,000 in 2005.

### *Women in arts and media:*

- News media offer women opportunities for expression and discussion of gender issues, that don't exist in conventional genres.

- At the same time, global communications networks provide conservatives and traditionalists with new platforms from which to attack all discourses that favour liberation, development and the participation of women in production and creative work.
- In the Arab world, broadcast media, notably satellite channels, and print media are expanding, employing more women in some countries. But the ownership of political and hard news media remains for the most part a male bastion, and Arab women's interest in the media is limited mostly to concerns such as cooking, housekeeping and cosmetics.
- The Arab novel has not only attacked stereotypes about women; it has also shed light on aspects of women's oppression and their role as accessories in perpetuating male dominance. The worlds constructed by major Arabic novelists such as Najib Mahfuz, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, Hanna Mina and others in their narrative innovation sharply observe the transformations and contradictions of the Arab social situation in all its aspects, especially male-female relationships. Feminist literature became more prominent with the emergence of female novelists such as Colette Khoury, Ghada al-Samman, Ahlam Mustaghanimi, Huda Barakat, Radwa 'Ashur, Laila Al Atrash, Sahar Khalifa and Layla al-'Uthman.
- Arab cinema in recent years has challenged established hierarchies with its graphic depictions of the oppression of women, and its effect on their psyches. In 2004, "Bahibb is-Sima" ("I Love the Cinema"), directed by Usama Fawzi, caused a public outcry in Egypt and the greater Arab world with its story of a Coptic woman who suffers from sexual deprivation because of her husband's religious extremism and enters into a sexual relationship with another man. A second major outcry occurred in 2005 and concerned the Egyptian film, "Al-Bahithat 'an Al-Hurriyya" ("Women Searching for Freedom"), directed by Inas Al-Dighaydi. The film deals with the problems of three women from Egypt, Lebanon and Morocco living in Paris and searching for the freedom that they had lost in their own countries. Scores of articles were written against the film, which was dubbed "Women in Search of Sex". Posters were vandalised and there was a general call for people not to see the film. The director was subjected to numerous false accusations and received several death threats.
- In the same context, the cinemas of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have been increasingly concerned with matters considered taboo, such as problems of sexual violence, the unfairness of laws, and problems of marginalisation and exclusion.

### **Gender rights are not a Western import to the Arab world**

- Although the cause of women's empowerment is often viewed as a Western import--particularly after the events of September 11, 2001, led Western powers to take an active interest in liberalising Arab society-- it has deep historic roots in the region. Egypt's first "women's educational society" was founded in 1881, with raising public awareness of women's rights as a key objective. The 1940s, under colonialism, saw a surge in women's organisations, most of which dedicated themselves to issues like polygamy and women's right to education. Arab women's movements first mobilised in support of national liberation, then, after independence, turned to their own issues.
- Generally speaking, the growing number of women's associations and organisations in the Arab world can be counted as a positive phenomenon, indicating a healthy multiplicity at the level of discourse and activities.

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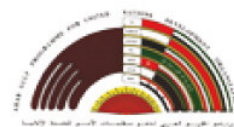
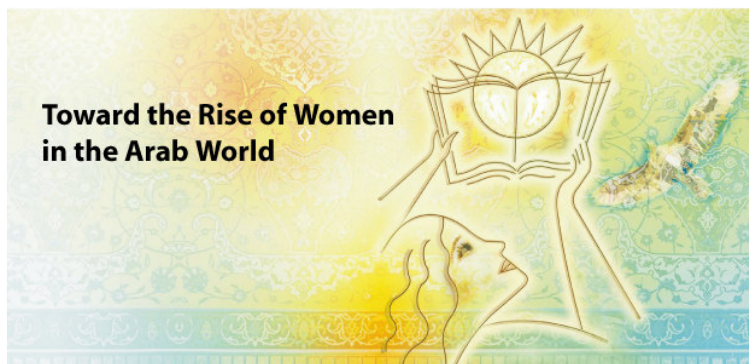
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## ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2005

# 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.