

ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND EUROPE

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Synopsis of Arab Human Development Report 2002

ARAB COUNTRIES HAVE MADE significant strides in more than one area of human development in the last three decades. Nevertheless, the predominant characteristic of current Arab reality, as we have seen in Part II of this Report, seems to be the existence of deeply rooted shortcomings in the Arab societal structure. These shortcomings are an obstacle to building human development. We summarised them in the three deficits of freedom, empowerment of women, and knowledge. Taking these shortcomings into consideration, as in the composition of our human development indicator, leads to the retreat of the positions of Arab countries compared to the traditional Human Development Index. It is thus clear that the challenge of building genuine human development remains a very serious one for the vast majority of Arabs. From a positive perspective, the realisation of human development in the Arab Homeland requires transcending current shortcomings, and even transforming them into their opposites, i.e. advantages enjoyed by all Arabs, assets we can be proud of before the rest of the world.

Specifically, the report concludes that Arab countries need to embark on rebuilding their societies on the basis of:

1. Full respect for human rights and freedoms as the cornerstone of good governance leading to human development.
2. Empowerment of Arab women by availing all opportunities, and especially those enabling the building of human capabilities, to girls and women on the basis of equality with their male “brothers”.
3. The consolidation of knowledge acquisition and its effective utilisation in building human capabilities. Knowledge has also to be efficiently used in all aspects of societal activities, striving towards the maximisation of human welfare in the region.

Future Arab Human Development Reports

It should come as no surprise then that the AHDR team has decided to devote the second Arab Human Development

Report, scheduled for mid 2003, to the theme of “Building the knowledge society in the Arab countries” and the third Arab Human Development Report, due for launch in mid 2004, to “Deepening Freedom, through instituting Good Governance, in the Arab countries”.

The Role of Europe

Europe can play a significant role in building human development in Arab countries by contributing effectively to the attainment of these three objectives.

In order to accomplish this, however, Europe needs to revamp its attitude and policies towards the Arab region. First, Europe needs to relinquish abdicating to the US in world affairs at large and in the Middle East in particular. As a case in point, the position of official Europe, Spain not excepted, vis-à-vis a looming destructive war in the Arab region in the face of overwhelming popular opposition, and with a notable exception for the noble position of the European Parliament, is gravely disappointing, indeed shameful. In fact, with elected political leaders going in international affairs flagrantly opposite to popular opinion, Western democracy is being steadily eroded to an extent that Europe is losing its credentials to preach democracy to the rest of the World.

Moreover, Europe needs to change its approach to helping Arab countries from that of the snobbish rich helping poor neighbours across the Mediterranean to a longer-range perspective of partnership based on mutual respect and deep understanding.

Spain, in particular, is impeccably qualified to act as the forefront of Europe in dealing with the Arab countries. All Arabs have fond memories of “Andalusia” which represent a unique cultural bond linking Arabs to Spain. It is a shame that this precious bond goes unutilised in building stronger relationships with Europe through Spain.

Last but surely not least, FRIDE can contribute a great deal to cementing stronger Euro-Arab ties in the service of human development in the Arab region through its raison d’être: dialogue, especially between Arabs and Europe-Spain.

A TRUE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE OF DEVELOPMENT

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LAST FEBRUARY 5TH, Nader Fergany presented the Arab Human Development Report of the UNDP, at FRIDE. The report is a new example of Dr. Fergany's humanistic approach to his work on Political Science, an approach he shares with Amartya Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998 for his work on poverty and famines.

The humanistic perspective is present throughout the whole report, but Dr. Fergany made a point of emphasizing it. He summarized the report in just three words: "development is freedom". The message is clear: unless development strengthens individuals and communities - "body and soul", to quote the report - it will never become sustained development.

In my opinion, it is precisely at the body and soul where we find the key to Fergany's thinking, and the strength of his argument against overemphasizing the economic development of peoples, for it must be accompanied by true human development, the development of individuals progressing as such, and should not - or at least, not only - be measured in terms of an increase in per capita income.

The aim should be to progress on the basis of sound and permanent advances in the field of freedom, considered as the true measure for development by the Report, as stated before. The Report does not refer to a type of freedom only related to civil and political rights, but to freedom in a wider context that distinguishes between essential and instrumental freedoms (such as political and economic freedom, transparency, among others.). Borrowing a brilliant quote from Amartya Sen, "development requires the disappearance of major sources of lack of freedom, from poverty to tyranny; from lack of opportunities for economic progress to systematic social deprivation; from the absence of public structures to intolerance or excessive activity of repressive states".

Obviously, putting human beings at the driver's seat means more than just assigning them - in many cases, in a purely virtual fashion - a percentage of the yield

produced by natural resources extracted from the subsoil of their home countries. As the Report indicates, and was explained at length by Fergany during the presentation, despite the obviousness of this, the sad truth is that when industrialized and democratic countries establish their trade priorities, they are not contributing to promote changes toward freedom. Their indifference only serves to sustain unacceptable regimes and situations, and does not assist in bringing about change when conditions are just ideal for it, such as the case of Tunisia, specifically mentioned by Fergany.

In the case of Europe, Fergany's criticism of Western passivity went beyond the trade-driven indifference of governments, and was made extensive to citizens as well. Dr Fergany presented a sharp global yet specific view of the world, and stressed the fact that there are several million Arabs living in Europe today (including the Maghrebi) who sometimes relay back to their home countries a reaction against our system of freedoms that ends up evolving into a more fierce type of fundamentalism than the one cultured back home. Therefore, one could refer to an unacceptable "loss of revenues" produced by the indifference of European society, which cannot ignore its responsibility in this process and must take measures in keeping with the relevance of what is at stake.

Undoubtedly, this is the great challenge for the 21st Century. Provided that Europe is capable of implementing joint development schemes to create the conditions for Arab immigrants - a fifth column if there ever was one - to open up their countries to knowledge society. Provided that Europe strives to make its system of freedoms attractive and not undesirable, in a few years this process of mutual respect and interaction among different cultures will have a great unstoppable impact on the Arab world.

As it was only to be expected, on the basis of the conviction that "development is freedom" and that development must involve both "body and soul", Fergany expressed his shock at the intentions of some countries of establishing a democratic system in Iraq using missiles.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report 2002*.

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Nader Fergany, "Social Innovation for Human Development. An Arab Region Perspective"

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ALMISHKAT Centre for Research (Egypt) - <http://www.almishkat.org>

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