

Part II

Towards The Rise Of Women In The Arab World

Frame Of Reference



CONCEPTS AND PROBLEMATIC ISSUES

CONCEPTS, THE HISTORICAL COURSE OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN, AND COUNTERMEASURES

CONCEPTS

THE RISE¹ OF WOMEN²

The rise of women in the Arab world is to be achieved as part of society's advancement towards freedom as advocated by the third Arab Human Development Report (2004). Arab countries can achieve this goal by eradicating all infringements on human dignity and specifically by guaranteeing full citizenship and the enjoyment of all human rights for all women on an equal footing with men.

The definition of freedom adopted here is not limited to civil and political freedoms – the pillars of citizenship. It extends to freedom from all that infringes on human dignity, including ignorance, illness, poverty and fear. This comprehensive notion of freedom follows the definition proposed in the third Arab Human Development Report on the one hand as well as the entire international human rights law on the other.

Enjoyment of human rights

It follows that the ultimate objective of the rise of women in the Arab region and the first organising principle behind it is for women – all women – in the Arab world to enjoy all components of human rights equally with men.

In the context of human development, “the rise of Arab women” entails liberating women from the legal and institutional constraints that tie their hands and assign them an inferior social status. It also means giving them the tools to advance through the development of their capabilities. This is to be accomplished by guaranteeing women and men equal opportunities to acquire and utilise capabilities essential for all human beings. This refers, in particular, to the acquisition of health (in its positive and comprehensive sense) and to the lifelong acquisition of knowledge, starting with complete equality in this respect between girls and boys.

Guarantee of equality of opportunity

It also entails guaranteeing complete equality of opportunity for the effective employment of such capabilities in all spheres of human activity – productive, social and political – so as ultimately to close the gap between the sexes in terms of their enjoyment of both the material and moral components of human welfare.

Complete equality of opportunity, based on respect for the right to freedom in its comprehensive sense, is thus the second organising principle in promoting “the rise of Arab women”.

The main appeal in this Report, therefore, is not solely for justice for all women in Arab countries, though this must be achieved. It is for justice for all in those countries, both men and women. This leads to the subject of the rights of citizenship.

The rise of women in the Arab world is part of society's advancement towards freedom.

The ultimate objective ... is for women – all women – in the Arab world to enjoy all components of human rights equally with men.

¹The first Arab Human Development Report (2002) used the terminology “women’s empowerment,” clearly an Arabisation of an English term. Perhaps a better term in the Arabic language is “the rise of woman” in contrast to “the empowerment of woman” to connote woman’s struggle for her rights through the building of her capacity and its effective use in a conducive societal framework. These are all important elements of the Report’s concluding strategic vision.

² “Women” in this context is a noun describing gender; hence, the reference is to ALL women in Arab countries without discrimination whatsoever.

Human development requires first the respect of citizenship rights for all, and in particular for women on an equal footing with men.

Equality between men and women does not mean denying differences to ensure the human dignity of all members of society.

Guarantee of full citizenship rights³ for women

AHDR 2004 concluded with a comprehensive definition of freedom, which couples individual freedom with justice and is synonymous, on the one hand, with human development, and, on the other, with the entire human rights system as contained in the International Bill of Human Rights Law. This definition ties the maintenance of freedom to the establishment of good governance, thus ensuring complete rights of citizenship for all Arab citizens.

Since, however, citizenship rights are not fully respected in Arab countries, particularly in the case of women, human development requires first the respect of citizenship rights for all, and in particular for women on an equal footing with men. No infringement of women's human dignity or their effective citizenship rights can be justified on the grounds of gender. In this context, it should be noted that temporary affirmative action to facilitate women's attainment of the decision-making positions from which they have long been excluded is not equivalent to discrimination in rights of citizenship.

Therefore, the guarantee of full citizenship rights for all Arab citizens, particularly women, is the third organising principle in understanding "the rise of Arab women".

EQUALITY WITH RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCE

Women are certainly different from men, but that does not in any way imply they are deficient.

Bio-physiological differences, which are not deficiencies and may at times be advantages (Fergany, in Arabic, 2006), together with certain socio-historical differences, have been primarily responsible for the unjust treatment of women. At times, however, such differences may also be to a woman's advantage (as when she invokes her right under labour law to maternity leave, a right granted in view of the importance to society of her reproductive role).

The exploitation of differences between the procreative functions of the sexes and the

resulting burdens for women gave men an advantage by endowing them with a freedom of movement that helped them to entrench themselves in society and to dominate it. They also provided men with the opportunity to establish the symbolic world (i.e., knowledge system) in keeping with their dominance. On the other hand, women's relative immobility, owing to their being occupied with the nurture of children, partly accounted for their weak participation in both the symbolic world and public activity in general. At the same time, however, that relative immobility gave women a better understanding and reading of the symbolism linked to the physical and emotional states associated with survival and health, and especially those of children (Nadeau, 1996, 50-60).

Equality between men and women does not mean denying differences. Differences may have emanated from biology, but they have been consolidated and exaggerated by inherited culture to the benefit of men. Respecting such differences in their proper context, without exaggeration or understatement, is necessary for achieving equality between the sexes. Exaggerating differences leads to further discrimination against women and deprives them of their rights. Understating such differences can result in cosmetic equality and also deny women their rights. This Report therefore affirms the principle of difference between the sexes without implying discrimination or the comprehensive superiority of one sex over the other. Additionally, it argues that making the most of this difference, and ensuring human dignity, can be a strong basis for human advancement. Consequently, the Report supports complete equality of citizenship for all citizens, i.e. for all men and women, while respecting the difference between the sexes in all forms of social organisation without detriment to women's rights so as to ensure the human dignity of all members of society and to empower them collectively to acquire and use essential capabilities efficiently. It follows that this will involve all of society, on equal terms, in a serious effort to achieve human development in the Arab countries.

This position is consistent with the adoption

³ Meaning complete equality in rights and duties among all citizens.

Inequality between the Sexes through History

Since ancient times, the basic, primary relationship between man and woman has been one of mutual co-operation, with both working to enable the survival of the species, banish violence and maintain affection and compassion. These are values that not only persist, regardless of changing lifestyles, but that are also central to the prevention of extinction and the capacity to create and renew. The age of metals saw a new pattern of relationship between man and woman, for this period was linked to urbanisation, men's work, and the exclusion of woman's mental and physical labour from the public space. Muscle power and, subsequently, military skills predominated. The difference between the sexes in nature and role was turned into sex-based discrimination in rights and duties.

However, patriarchal society was unable to exclude the female in symbolic fields, where she was found in the form of the Goddess of Fertility and Beauty, for her presence was well established in myth, ancient belief and politics. The myth of Osiris, where Isis is the mother goddess, goddess of the earth and mistress of nature, acts out the image of a strong female presence in situations of human and physical production, an image that would later cross the Mediterranean without modification.

Women also played a leading role in the history of our region. The role of Egyptian queens in society, in authority, in government, in family structures, in marriage and in divorce reflects the importance of their role during the pharaonic period. In Mesopotamia, women had high social and religious status, reflected in statues of motherhood and fertility, and especially those of Ishtar, goddess of love, fertility and life. Women were linked to the moon, which was associated with sexual life and fertility. Even though the division of labour in Babylonian society was more patriarchal, the latter also guaranteed women rights relating to the ownership of property, work, divorce, and more.

When women were enslaved, they responded in many ways, some active. Strong women who reached positions of power shattered the preconceived images by unsettling the symbolic and ideological foundations of man's authority. Alternatively, women diverted themselves into roles behind the scenes in which they supported rulers, leaders and scholars.

Source: Haytham Manna, background paper for the Report.

The French Revolution broke the vicious circle of patriarchal logic. Although many Enlightenment thinkers could not set aside the heavy historical legacy, they put the central existential question on the table once again by asking, "Is discrimination against women the result of culture or nature?" Distinguished personalities such as Condorcet and La Cluse had the courage to respond, in the *Encyclopaedia*, that there is nothing in nature that allows discrimination; it is a consequence of social existence, and there is therefore no justification for making one sex the *raison d'être* of the other.

This revolutionary break freed woman as an individual and allowed the question of her rights to be raised in a new form. Women entered public life by force, as citizens, albeit without the rights of citizenship. Yet their role went beyond that of simple rebellion to become pivotal during major events of the Revolution (for example, those of 5 and 6 October 1789). Women stood up on podiums and in parliament, organised themselves in clubs and drew up petitions. This transformation succeeded in frightening even the most revolutionary men. Olympe de Gouges, author of the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen paid at the guillotine the ultimate price for her transgression against the spirit of the age.

Humanity's battle against the logic of discrimination began with the introduction of the positive concept of human rights, a framework that did not derive from a divine ruling denying women the status of individuals. But it would take humanity two hundred years to achieve the first international text demanding the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women. However, it took only about a century for this concept to enter the Arab world. This started the process by which the European experience became the inspiration for the rediscovery of the early Islamic belief in equality between the sexes. That early belief is manifested in the writings of Qasim Amin, Mohammad Abdu and an elite of enlightened Islamic thinkers who considered opposition to discrimination a return to the genuine essence of Islam. In what is now known as the Arab Renaissance, Mansur Fahmi and Salama Musa, meanwhile, argued for a break with the past as a pre-requisite to reshaping the relationship between the sexes on the basis of equality.

by the AHDR series, and especially AHDR 2004, of the human rights system in its fullest form as contained in the International Bill of Rights. Of particular relevance here is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Box 1-3 and annex III).

THE RISE OF ARAB WOMEN AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB WORLD ARE INSEPARABLY AND CAUSALLY LINKED!

Since the publication of the first AHDR 2002, this series has established the definitive

Qasim Amin: The Advancement of Women Is a Step towards Civilisation

As a whole, the progress of nations is contingent upon many diverse factors, among the most important of which is the progress of women. Conversely, the decline of nations is the product of many diverse factors, among the most

important of which is the decline in the status of women. The inferior status of women in our country is one of the most formidable obstacles to the promotion of our own welfare.

Source: Amin, in Arabic, 1899, 132-133.

correlation, almost a causal one, between human development and the rise of women in the Arab World⁴. The causal correlation between the two logical concepts indicates that the validity of one entails the validity of the other.

⁴ This position has been controversial among some observers and maybe among the Arab population at large (AHDR 2003, Box "what Arabs think of the Three Deficits" page19).

Excerpts from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Annex III provides the full text of the Convention.

Adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979. Entered into force on 3 September 1981.

Article 1

"...the term 'discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".

Article 2

"States parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:

- (a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation...
- (c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination".

Article 5

"States parties shall take all appropriate measures

- (a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women".

The AHDR series contends that "human development" means that human beings, by virtue simply of being human, are entitled to respect for their intrinsic human dignity and have an innate right to a life of material and moral dignity. This entails equal opportunities to acquire human capabilities and utilise them effectively to achieve the highest possible level of well-being for all. It follows that all forms of discrimination among humans are rejected regardless of the criteria of discrimination.

This definition also underlines that the achievement of human development in the Arab world follows necessarily from the rise of Arab women. In other words, 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 the society of freedom, including the denial of opportunities for the acquisition and effective utilisation of human capabilities.

Luminary: Nazik al-Mala'ika

Iraqi poet Nazik al-Mala'ika is regarded as the pioneer of modern poetry in the Arab nation and one of the first Arab poets to write stress-based verse. She is also considered a pioneer in the field of the critical theory of modern verse.

Al-Mala'ika was born in Baghdad in 1923. Her father was known for his interest in jurisprudence and logic and for his love of literature and poetry, while her mother, Salma 'Abd al-Razzaq, was herself a poet. In this fertile climate, Al-Mala'ika's poetic talent blossomed while she was still a young school girl. It comes as no surprise that her poem, "Cholera," regarded as the beginning of the departure from the columnar-arrangement tradition of Arabic poetry and a first triumph in the establishment of free verse, was published as early as 1945.

The poet graduated from the Fine Arts Institute in 1949. In 1950, she travelled to the United States, where she studied Latin and comparative literature at Princeton University. The study of French that she also undertook there, along with her mastery of English, enabled her to make translations of literature in these languages into Arabic. In

1959, she returned to Iraq to immerse herself once more in her literary preoccupations with poetry and criticism. Her experience of living overseas and reading widely in the most modern schools of world literature (including Chinese, German, Indian, Italian and Russian as well as American, French and English) left her culturally open to different human civilisations and endowed her with a diverse poetic vision and sensitivity. This clearly acted to deepen the innovativeness of her poetry and her prosodic theory. Al-Mala'ika lived in Iraq, working in its universities, including the University of Basra, without interrupting her poetic output until 1960.

At the start of the 1960s, with her move to Lebanon, the poet entered a new phase of her life, Beirut being, throughout that period and until the mid-1970s, the living heart of Arabic culture. Al-Mala'ika now started publishing works of poetry and criticism. These works were extraordinary in the way in which they confronted and clashed with poetic and critical assumptions that had remained contentedly comatose until challenged by her and certain other Iraqis of her generation, such as, in first place, Badr al-Shakir al-Sayyab, and

also Buland al-Haydari, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayyati and Lami'a 'Amara.

Nazik al-Mala'ika published numerous collections of verse and critical studies though many of her poems are not included in these and remain scattered throughout the pages of innumerable Iraqi and other Arab literary magazines and journals. Her poetic output includes the following anthologies: 'Ashiqat al-Layl (Lover of the Night), 1947; Shazaya wa-Ramad (Splinters and Ashes), 1949; Qarar al-Mawja (The Bottom of the Wave), 1957; Shajarat al-Qamar (The Moon Tree), 1968; Ma'sat al-Hayat wa-Ughniyat al-Insan, Malhama Shi'riyya (The Tragedy of Life and the Song of Humankind, an Epic Poem), 1970; Yughayyir Alwanahu al-Bahr (The Sea Changes its Colours), 1977; and Lil-Salat wal-Thawra (For Prayer and the Revolution), 1978.

Her works of criticism include Qadaya al-Shi'r al-Mu'asir (Issues in Contemporary Poetry), 1962; Al-Sawma'a wal-Shurfa al-Hamra' (The Monk's Cell and the Red Box), 1965; and Sikulujiyyat al-Shi'r (The Psychology of Poetry), 1993.

Fowziyah Abu-Khalid

Source: "Azzaman." (2004). <http://www.azzaman.com/azzaman/articles/2004/09/09-26/698.htm> (Accessed 12 April, 2006).

The causal relationship between the rise of Arab women and human development in the Arab world will, therefore, be fulfilled only so long as it encompasses the human development of all citizens of the region.

MEANS OF COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN: THE EVOLUTION OF CONCEPTS OF “WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT”

The Global Level

Development programmes and policies relating to women have passed through many stages, reflecting changes in the economic development policies in the world generally. For example, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the prevailing thinking was that “modernisation” – usually equated with industrialisation and mechanisation – would improve living standards and life in developing countries for all sectors of society, including women. This period was characterised by the prevalence of a “charity-based” orientation towards women, centred on supporting women’s reproductive role and on issues such as education and public health for women. The same period also witnessed the beginning of the shift from a charitable to a developmental orientation.

The United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976–1985), launched at the first United Nations World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, was a major spur to the advancement of thinking with respect to women and development. The trend during this decade was towards women in development (WID), which acknowledged a difference between men’s and women’s realities and their experience in development. This, in turn, was reflected in the formulation of new strategies to improve the situation of women in developing countries, focusing on the productive rather than the reproductive side of their lives.

In this context, international donor agencies began implementing income-generating programmes for women, teaching them various skills and trades or enrolling them in cooperative production and marketing projects, as well as

developing technology to lighten the burdens of women’s work. Attention was also given to seeking the equal participation of women in education and employment and to promoting a view of women as independent producers and not merely as adjuncts of their husbands. The previous approach to women was criticized for focusing on the productive side of women’s lives while disregarding their reproductive roles, which were viewed as “private” issues outside the scope of revenue generating developmental projects (Rathegeber, 1990).

With the second Decade for Women, which began with the United Nations Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, the prevailing perspective changed to “gender and development”.

The gender-and-development perspective stems from a comprehensive vision of the socio-economic and political structure that seeks to understand the mechanisms of role distribution between men and women and the responsibilities and expectations of each. It therefore analyses the nature of women’s contribution to the larger work environment inside and outside the home, including non-commodity production, and rejects the public/private work divide that has been used in general to downplay the significance of women’s labour for the maintenance of the family and home.

The gender-and-development perspective also attributes an important role to the State in the liberation of women, especially in respect of providing social services that enable women to play their various reproductive, socio-reproductive and political roles. However, this perspective also emphasises that women are basic agents in bringing about change and not passive recipients of the assistance offered by development. It thus gives special importance to the need for women to organise themselves to become effective forces for political change (Rathegeber, 1990).

Critical evaluation of the application of “women-and-development” concepts in the Arab region

The development approaches described above have received attention within the Arab region. Between the 1950s and 1970s, members of

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The spread of the women-and-development concept in the Arab region aroused the anger of certain socio-political powers.

national elites motivated by the drive for modernisation came to power and concentrated on central planning, industrialisation and the more efficient employment of human resources. Regimes of this type, in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Tunisia, expanded health services and education to reach women in various social sectors and were concerned about enrolling women in general production. During this period, many Arab women gained important entitlements such as free general education. Their participation in the job market expanded, especially in the public sector, and they obtained health and social insurance. This period also witnessed new legislation, which granted women rights such as the rights to work, to education and to health in addition to certain political rights, such as the right to vote and to run for election to parliament. Women were also appointed as ministers, and “model” women in various practical and scientific fields were honoured by the State as a way for the latter to show its support for new roles for women in the public sphere.

Despite these important State accomplishments, often termed “developmentalist” or “State feminist,” such policies were criticised by some as top-down gifts prepared without the participation of their supposed beneficiaries. The latter, however, were the same parties that were capable of protecting and developing them. Critics also contended that, at the same time as the State was granting women such recognition in the name of modernisation, it was working to destroy their unions and independent associations and either co-opt women within its executive framework or marginalise them. Women thus were left no space to criticize the problems and lapses of modernisation itself (Kandiyoti, 1991; Molyneux, 1991; Hatem, 1994a, 2000). Countries were also criticized for their reluctance to introduce radical changes to the law in general and especially to those laws relating to the internal organisation of family relations, thus preserving the view of a woman as a man’s dependant.

As a result of the spread of economic restructuring and the allocation of a larger role to market forces and the private sector in the late 1970s, the State’s role in national

development operations declined, as did that of the public sector, the largest employer of women. There was, however, no corresponding growth in the capacity of the private sector to absorb the increasing female workforce. With the withdrawal of the State from numerous productive and service areas, NGOs expanded significantly and were encouraged to fill the gap, especially with regard to the provision of social services and economic assistance.

The 1985 United Nations conference on women in Nairobi and the follow-up international conferences in the series were important points in the introduction of women-and-development concepts to the Arab region. They greatly assisted in exposing Arab NGOs and Arab governments to the issue of women development.

Though a large number of Arab CSOs continued with their charity-based approach to work, many others, especially among the new NGOs that began to appear in the mid-1980s, adopted the gender-and-development approach. This led to a substantial crop of papers, research projects and approaches analysing the situation of women from a gender perspective. These outcomes helped in raising awareness of the various types of discrimination against women and in pressuring governments to adopt policies fairer to women and to work to bridge gender gaps.

The spread of the women-and-development concept in the Arab region aroused the anger of certain socio-political powers. The latter felt that the concept was “imposed” by the West and did not arise from the reality or the needs of Arab women, which were assumed to centre on strengthening the role of the family as opposed to the individual as society’s basic building block (Huwaydi, in Arabic, 1998). This reaction led some to resist gender-sensitive development plans and the State and women’s organisations that adopted this perspective.

A number of development organisations have adopted the concept of “women’s empowerment” as a general compass for policies and activities in women’s development. As with many concepts relating to women’s development, that of “empowerment” has caused controversy in women’s and developmental circles. Some feel that the

concept of empowerment is incapable of achieving the desired change because it focuses only on the empowerment of individuals. It neglects collective empowerment, which aims to change the social, economic and political infrastructure that generates oppression and discrimination not only against women but against the majority of the poor and the marginalised as well (Agarwal, 1994; Kabeer, 2003; Radtke and Stam, 1994; Rowlands, 1998).

The concept of empowerment was translated literally by many of the NGOs working for women's development. Some concentrated on empowering women to demand equal rights and the abolition of the discrimination in Arab laws, whether with regard to naturalisation rights, personal status or social security. Others focused on offering loans and establishing income-generating projects or providing services in the health, education or other sectors. Despite the importance of these interventions in assisting some women and individuals, the path to the collective empowerment of women has yet to be taken, as chapters 2 and 3 seek to illustrate.

PROBLEMATIC ISSUES IN THE RISE OF WOMEN

THE QUESTION OF THE "INTERNAL" AND THE "EXTERNAL"

It cannot be overemphasised that the cause of women is a global issue and not one that pertains only to the Arab world. Indeed, the successes and experiences of women's movements around the world have expanded the horizons of Arab women's organisations, provided windows of opportunity for their members and sustained their faith in the possibility of proactive change. Such change will nonetheless come about only if the interlocking impediments that prevent it from taking place are dismantled.

Likewise, an enforced separation between what is deemed local and what is deemed foreign is no longer possible in this age. What is called "foreign" culture actually thrives within Arab communities – particularly in terms of values and styles of behaviour – owing to the

BOX 1-4

Excerpts from United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)

1. Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;
10. Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict".

Full text of the resolution is provided in annex III.

increasing globalisation of Arab communities. Nor is such a separation beneficial, for there can be no doubt that the aspiration for progress in the Arab world – which is an authentic aspiration – has been positively influenced since the beginning of the Arab renaissance by the best human accomplishments of Western civilisation.

Specifically, there is collaboration, largely beneficial, between the struggle for women's emancipation in the Arab countries as a liberating orientation in Arab society and women's movements around the world, including in the West. The efforts of international organisations are of special importance in this respect especially with regard to the agreements, resolutions, mechanisms and international activities aimed at protecting women's rights and equal treatment.

These positive advances, however, do not alter the fact that the empowerment of women in Arab countries has lately intersected with the political objectives of dominant world powers in the region that are reflected in externally initiated reform initiatives. These initiatives focus on empowering women, possibly as a type of reform tolerable to despotic regimes as an alternative to abolishing the structures of oppression. This may explain the relatively better progress made in women's empowerment compared to the faltering pace of political reform, through an increase in the number of high-profile women appointed to leading State positions. Despite this, however, women's share of such leadership positions still fails to reflect fully the reality of their effective presence in all domains.

Some feel that the concept of empowerment is incapable of achieving the desired change because it focuses only on the empowerment of individuals.

The cause of women is a global issue and not one that pertains only to the Arab world.

Ambiguous (external) efforts have led many Arabs to stigmatise the endeavour to liberate women as a task taken from the agenda of Western imperialism.

The violation of national sovereignty by external forces casts a shadow on the rise of women

In modern Arab history, the suffering of Arabs resulting from violations of their sovereignty by external forces has led to the even greater subjugation of women. Failure to confront the region's enemies is among the factors that have spawned a renewed emphasis on male-centred notions of honour and glory arising from an overwhelming feeling of humiliation.

This painful emotion is, on the one hand, denied and, on the other, transcended in hopes of saving the wounded male ego by grasping at illusory sources of personal power on the level of the self and its historical identity. These compensating assertions of power express themselves in the oppression of social groups, such as women, who are thought to be weak or deficient.

This problem appeared in a new light when the present American Administration

designated the reform of Arab social structures as part of its "war on terror". Here the report refuses to accept the confusion of the criminal terrorisation of innocent people, which is unreservedly condemned, with legitimate resistance to foreign occupation and racism, which is justified in international human rights law.

While the "liberation" of Arab women has assumed a high position on the reform agenda of certain foreign powers, the eradication of totalitarian structures and authoritarianism has not received similar priority. The threat of foreign intervention in the Arab region, by coercion or by force of arms, also continues to be legitimised as a way to implement plans by dominant forces in the world power structure.

The nature of the American project for the Arab woman is revealed in its clearest form in the attempt to formulate a "guiding model" for Arab women on Iraqi soil (Box 1-5). This model aims to restructure the social fabric of that country as though the Iraqi woman had emerged with the invasion and occupation. It ignores her long patriotic struggle, first against British occupation, then under the previous despotic regime, and finally against the present American-British occupation.

Such ambiguous efforts have led many Arabs to stigmatise the endeavour to liberate women as a task taken from the agenda of Western imperialism and to demean those who call for it as creatures of the West. Moreover, foreign calls for reform, even if by force if necessary, have also created a backlash against Arab models for the rise of women, which have been bracketed with outside initiatives considered to encroach on Arab culture and sovereignty. All of this has harmed the cause of the rise of women in Arab countries and those who support it.

This does not mean, however, that the social struggle for women's development should be abandoned. Indeed, that reaction would leave the space open for externally imposed reform plans and strengthen them. It is unfortunate, though, that the rejection of foreign-inspired initiatives should negatively impact on genuine calls for the rise of women that are firmly grounded in national and humane frameworks.

BOX 1-5

Haifa Zangana: Iraqi Women and the Discourse of the American Occupation

In the months just before the start of the war on Iraq, a number of Iraqi and Iraqi-American women's organisations were founded, with two objectives. The first of these was tactical, namely, to provide a moral justification for the war following the increase in popular opposition in America and elsewhere. The second was strategic and had the goal of using the success of the women's agenda in Iraq as a model that could be replicated throughout the Arab and Islamic countries to sanctify United States political, military and economic activities. Thus the women members of the organisations in question undertook intense and enthusiastic activities of unprecedented scope in support of the United States in the stages leading up to the war and also, afterwards, in furtherance of the American discourse.

In line with American discourse on Iraq and the region, the programmes of these women's organisations and the statements of their members, whether inside or outside Iraq, are devoid of certain terms that are deeply rooted in Iraqi society and, indeed, throughout

almost all societies in the world. These are the terms that denote concepts of nationalism, national sovereignty and independence. These matters are entirely missing, together with any call to put an end to the occupation. It may be that such terms are excluded because they express the principles that grant any occupied people the legal and moral right to resist.

This is why Iraqi women's organisations of this type have failed – despite their extensive material resources and the support of the American Administration and Iraq's temporary governments – to achieve any practical success in Iraqi women's circles and have been unable to win the Iraqi women's vote. Nor have they been able to expand. On the contrary, they have remained more or less limited to the names on the first list of founders. The reason for this is that they quite simply do not represent the Iraqi woman and have no relation to her priorities, her realities or her aspirations. Their programmes remain merely one more point of implementation for the American project in Iraq.

Source: Zangana, 2005.

Rather, the response to such imperious schemes and to those who use them as pretexts to delay or prevent Arab women from achieving their rights is to integrate the rise of women, in thought and practice, as a solid pillar of a comprehensive Arab renaissance project. This

will be the most effective way to combat both despotism at home and interference from abroad, through a collective rebirth that would secure the dignity and inviolability of all Arabs, women and men alike.

An Arab renaissance integrates the rise of women, in thought and practice, as a solid pillar.

BOX 1-6

Arab Public Opinion in Four Arab Countries Bespeaks Strong Support for the Rise of Arab Women

The methodology of the Arab Human Development Report has been based on field-based research surveys on the topic of each particular Report with the aim of enriching the database on the subject at hand by adding epistemological insights that cannot be obtained from the standard sources of data and information.

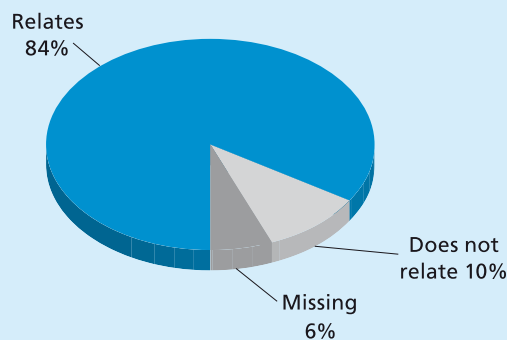
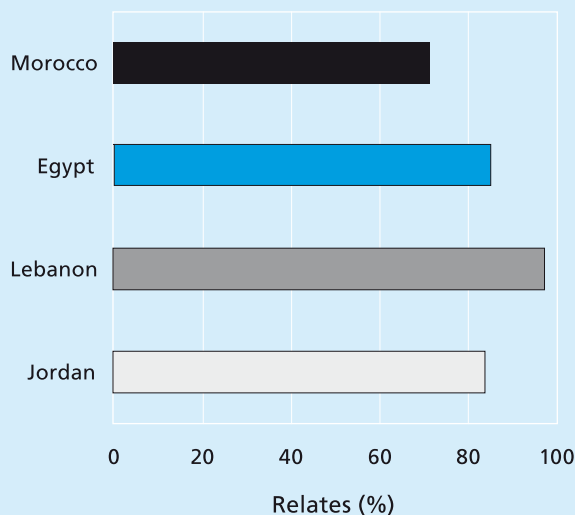
For this edition, the Report team supervised the design and implementation of a public opinion survey on a number of issues relating to the rise of Arab women in four Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco) whose diversity of geographical location and societal structures was expected to lead to diversity in the positions of the public on those issues; together these countries form more than one third of the population of the Arab region (36.5 per cent). The survey was conducted in each participating country on a representative sample of each society comprising around 1,000 people divided equally between men and women over 18 years of age. The national surveys were conducted by establishments in the countries involved independently of the Report team (Annex II).

Some of the results of the field survey are presented in the form of boxes inserted in the chapters of this Report under the title “Public Opinion on Aspects of the Rise of Arab Women, Four Arab Countries, 2005”. Each box contains two charts. The one on the right summarises the results of the survey regarding the issue under study in the four countries taken together, while the chart on the left presents the results for each individual country with regard to one of the most critical of the responses to the question .

The most important result from the survey is that the Arab public, represented in the samples from the four participating Arab countries, aspires to a much greater degree of equality between men and women. This conclusion would, however, vary according to the extent of equality from one country to another and depending on the strength of traditional societal structures within the country.

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

Does gender equality relate to the total concept of freedom?



It is not surprising that the results of these surveys point to aspirations towards a level of gender equality higher than that found today and certainly higher than that which will result if societal structures that hamper the rise of Arab women continue unchanged. However, these results must also be understood in the light of the well-known distinction – recognized as being potentially great – between attitudes and actual behaviour on the one hand and the limited abilities of regimes in the Arab countries to give expression to the popular will on the other.

Accordingly, the survey results indicate a popular endorsement of the support expressed in the chapters of this Report for the rise of women and presented explicitly in its Strategic Vision (Chapter 10).

The survey results presented in the Public Opinion boxes at times support the Report’s analysis but more often constitute a dialectical engagement with the contents of its analytical sections and their strategic and futuristic orientation, which culminates in Chapter 10.

Despotic authority and the rise of women

Ideally, a shift towards a society of freedom and good governance according to the concept outlined at the start of this chapter, would bring about the rise of Arab women as part of a comprehensive effort to realise human development in the Arab world.

Historical experience reveals, however, that the opposite was not always the case. In other words, the relationship between the nature of ruling authority and the advancement of women has always been complicated if only because of the complex nature of the surrounding social context.

On the one hand, repressive regimes have contributed to important achievements in favour of women's rights that might not have been achieved if matters had been left to the natural progress of society, given its imposed constraints. At the head of such achievements is the exponential expansion in girls' education within a conservative environment; here it is possible to say that the various authorities, despotic as they may be, have been ahead of society. However, this sort of progress is not limited to this one achievement, which is common to nearly all Arab regimes. Important achievements, pioneering by any standard, have been realised in Arab countries under regimes that lack components of the society of freedom and good governance.

The most famous example here is Tunisia, which can boast of pioneering achievements in women's rights through the decrees of a leader who enjoyed historical and national legitimacy even though his rule failed to maintain freedom and democracy.

There are numerous other examples. Women have achieved significant progress under the previous despotic rule in Iraq. In Egypt and other countries, achievements in the rise of women have been registered under the sponsorship of the highest levels of authority, albeit represented in the person of a First Lady and without enjoying any mass support. Examples of this include the endorsement in Egypt in 2000 of a woman's right to initiate divorce (*khul'*), which caused feverish debate within the community as a whole as well as in the parliament prior to its endorsement. It may

even be said that the mechanisms of political oppression have served at times to accelerate the rise of women, but this imperious, top-down style of "progress", however enlightened, is bound to encounter objections and resistance from the popular base.

More recently, the question of the role of ruling authorities has intersected with the external/internal question referred to earlier. Under regimes that basically derive their legitimacy from foreign support, achievements in women's rights have been encouraged, possibly in order to appease dominant global powers who call for reform, including women's empowerment, in Arab countries. The latter area appears to be the type of reform least damaging for current regimes, especially if they do not follow it through to its logical conclusion, which would entail empowering all citizens, especially the broad mass of women. This explains why one may see a women's summit in Arab countries but never a summit to protect freedoms or human rights both of which remain hard to achieve under the current ruling structures in the region.

While repressive authorities occasionally support the rise of women, on the other side of the coin, they also sometimes fall back on conservative social forces, whose rights to organisation and expression they deny but which they do not mind exploiting, in order to wash their hands of such demands. The most important example of this is the abstention of some governments from ratifying CEDAW or their registration, on ratification, of reservations to some of its most important articles on the pretext of representing the positions of conservative social forces in their constituencies.

For reasons discussed, the position of this Report is that the move towards good governance and the society of freedom in Arab countries can be crucial in realising required historic achievements for the rise of women but that steps taken must also receive wide support in society to ensure their sustainability and popular adoption. In such an ideal situation, government decisions would, on the one hand, reflect the popular will transparently and, on the other, create an atmosphere of freedom and good governance in general. This would establish the

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bases of equality among all citizens in such a way as to ensure the stability of the rights of women in particular as an authentic component of the society of freedom and good governance.

The undervaluation of women's participation in economic activity

As in many developing societies, Arab society does not acknowledge the true extent of women's participation in social and economic activities and in the production of the components of human well-being, and it does not reward women adequately for such participation.

Since most women work, without pay, for their families, their contributions are not recognised as economic activity. This historical prejudice is reflected in the undervaluing of women's contributions to different types of human activity in general and to economic activity in particular. It is widely believed, for example, that the contribution of women to economic life in Arab countries is weak. The theoretical basis for statistics on women's participation in economic activity is the national accounts system, which in turn derives from the neo classical theory of modernism that defines human production in terms of goods and services exchanged in the market and their cash value.

A number of caveats need to be made with regard to this theoretical basis, especially from the perspective of women's participation in human welfare.

First, the criteria for transactions in the market and their cash valuation restrict human welfare to a narrow definition that development literature has long gone beyond and that has no place within the human development perspective.

Second, most goods and services produced by women fall into the category of unpaid work within the family. This national accounts-based starting point excludes from the beginning the production of all those elements of human welfare that women provide within the family because these are not exchanged in the market and are not evaluated in cash. It may be asked, however, whether the affairs of any individual, or of any society, can go well or, to be more specific, whether any creativity or production

in the restricted sense, can thrive without these contributions.

Third, standard statistical processes, especially those in developing countries, suffer from several defects that are exacerbated when the contribution of women to the economy is involved. This shortcoming is not, however, the source of the contemptuous view of women and their participation in society still prevalent in developing countries.

The result is that independent standard statistics gravely underestimate women's participation in economic activity. Even tightening definitions and improving the quality of statistical operations lead nonetheless to massive variances in estimating the extent of women's participation in the economy.

If available statistics underestimate women's participation in economic activity, imagine how much more they fail to grasp the value of their contributions, direct and indirect, to human welfare, which cannot be achieved without women's participation in human society – and that with a multiplier effect that adds to the contribution of men. Of course, this does not mean that women's capacities should be limited to household work. Rather, it means that women's contributions, as with any human contributions to the collective welfare, whether inside or outside the home, should be recognised as having a value beyond narrow monetary terms. Moreover, how a woman chooses to use her capabilities should be a decision taken freely only by her.

In short, traditional methods of measuring the employment of women's capabilities, especially in economic terms, entail a severe injustice in respect of their actual contribution, which must be rated highly, if not in financial terms, then in terms of human values.

The evidence for this comes from alternative measures such as time-use research, which tries to capture the enormous contribution of women to the production of the elements of human welfare, contributions that at times come close to outweighing those of men, especially in developing societies. Most of these activities, such as fetching water and gathering fuel for cooking, light and heating, are overlooked by statistics that follow the logic of national accounts systems and their statistical tools.

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In Morocco for example, women's economic participation during 1997-1998 reached 71.4 per cent in the countryside, 34.6 per cent in towns and cities and 50.6 per cent at the national level. These percentages clearly exceed the traditional estimate (Morocco, Department of Statistics, in French, 1998).

On the other hand, if one uses the advanced criteria for human well-being broadly accepted in the field of human development, then no monetary evaluation of women's contribution to human welfare in Arab countries, no matter how high, will do justice to them or their potential to help build an Arab human renaissance.

A proper evaluation of women's contribution to producing the elements of human welfare requires a creative theoretical foundation that goes beyond the national accounts system, restricted as it is to market exchange and the cash valuation of goods and services. This can be done by moving to use a broad definition of human welfare that is appropriate to the concept of human development. In practical terms, this calls for the development of research and statistical tools that aim to measure accurately women's contribution to human welfare and human development. This is a field that is wide open to thought and research.

SUMMARY

This chapter has set out the conceptual framework of the present Report by revisiting the central concepts underpinning the series of Arab Human Development Reports, specifically those relating to freedoms, human rights, equality between men and women, and human dignity. Certain problematic issues related to the current situation of women in the Arab region have also been considered.

The contents of this chapter, especially of its second half, indicate that the situation of women in the Arab countries is the outcome of the interaction of many cultural, social, economic and political elements, which articulate in a complex manner. Some of these elements are problematically embedded in Arab societies and call for a wide, in-depth analysis of several components of these societies in order to diagnose the situation of women. Such an analysis should be followed by an attempt to interpret this situation objectively as a basis for crafting a strategic vision for the rise of Arab women in the Arab world.