

Democratic Transition and Development in the Arab World

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Towards an Integrated Social Policy for Arab Youth

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Introduction

- The nineties of the last century were characterized by the importance attached to social and human rights issues. From the Children's Summit in 1990 to the Human Rights Summit in 1993, to the Social Summit in 1995, etc, these activities culminated in the International forum in 2000, which was attended by Heads of States, and devoted to the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals¹.
- International Organizations covering the Arab World participated in preparing these summits, and therefore the attention of Arab Governments was focused on social and human rights issues. However, we believe that the importance given to these dimensions by the different Arab Governments remained limited, and was not conducive to the formulation of integrated political and socio economic policies in this part of the world.
- One should also note the importance given to "Youth" issues during the nineties, and especially the integration of youth in economic activities. Indeed, in 1995, the "International Plan of Action for Youth up to 2000 and beyond" was adopted, and several programs for employing Arab youth were formulated by the World Bank and OECD during the first decade of this century. Presently, one can note the "Middle East Initiative" formulated in 2006 between Brookings Institution and the Dubai Faculty for Government Administration, to invest the regional youth potential, and the Qatari "Silatech" initiative aiming at providing work opportunities for youth (18 to 30 years old) in the region².
- There is no doubt that Arab Youth initiated the Arab Spring, which began when a young Tunisian university graduate, Mohammad Bouazizi, set himself on fire after he was prevented from entering the labor market, sparking the Arab spring in twenty two Arab countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, etc³.
- Different factors have been presented to explain the Arab spring: (1) educated and unemployed young Arabs (2) the dictatorship and tribal character of the Arab state (3) Political Islam, and so on.
- We believe that the main explanation should go back to the present type of the Arab State, which was unable to formulate and implement an integrated political and socio economic strategy. Such a State neither respected nor took into

¹ This Summit adopted the following seven goals: (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (2) achieve universal primary education (3) promote gender equality and empower women (4) reduce child mortality (5) improve maternal health (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and (7) ensure environmental sustainability

² ESCWA 2011.

³ Of particular reference for literature on the Arab Spring, one should review " Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2011 " The Arab Spring... To Where?. A New Horizon for Democratic Change" (Collection of articles, Beirut, September 2011)

consideration the political, social, economic and human rights needs of the Arab population.

- We also believe that Political Islam is a vast domain containing a wide variety of currents, ranging from an enlightened approach which takes into consideration the fundamental political, social, economic and human rights of human beings, to a non democratic and anti humane current, close to the fanaticism found in some other religions or schools of thought.
- This presentation will shed light on the main demographic, educational and labour characteristics of Arab youth. It will propose some concrete steps to formulate an integrated social policy for Arab youth, and the main conditions for its implementation. Finally it will present some major recommendations to national authorities and the main international agencies concerned with development in the Arab World.

I. Main Social Characteristics of the Arab Youth

1. Demographic characteristics⁴

1.1 Total Population and Growth Rate

- By mid 2012 the total Arab population will reach 374 684 000 forming about 5.18 percent of the world population⁵.
- The five most populous Arab countries account for just under two thirds of the total Arab population. The order has changed between 1970 and 2015. As of 2015, the percentages were as follows: 23 in Egypt, 12 in Sudan⁶, 10 in Algeria and 9 in Iraq and Morocco.
- Gulf countries cover both national and non national populations. It is believed that Non nationals form a majority in UAE, Qatar and Kuwait. In 2001/2002 their percent varied from 80 to 72 to 63 in UAE, Qatar and Kuwait, respectively, compared to 40, 30 and 26 in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Oman⁷.
- "The demographic gift is that a larger share of the population will be economically active (between 15 and 64 years), thereby increasing the labour force, capital accumulation and per capita GDP" (Courbage 2010, p 7).

⁴ Data in this section are based on Tables 1 to 4

⁵ Based on UN – Population Division, 2010 revision

⁶ Before South Sudan separation

⁷ Ben Jalili, nd, p 52

1.2 Youth Bulge

- The youth bulge (15-24 years) forms almost a fifth of the total population of the Arab World, decreasing slightly from 21 percent in 2005 to 19 in 2015
- Generally, the proportion of the youth bulge increased between 1980 – 2005 and later decreased. More specifically, youth bulge increased in 6 countries, remained stable in 3 others, and decreased in 13 countries during these years. This reflects the history of changing fertility in the different Arab countries.
- " In 2050, the situation of the more advanced Arab/Moslem countries will be similar to that of the developed regions: Europe, North America, Australia, etc. with 12.8% aged 15-24 years and a ratio of the 15-24/ 25-64 of 23.4%" (Courbage 2009, p 31)

1.3 Fertility

- Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in the Arab World decreased from 3.8 in 2000 to 3.2 in 2009. In all separate countries a decreasing trend was observed (except Kuwait). Lebanon had the lowest TFR 1.8 in 2009 followed by Tunisia 2.0, and the highest in Somalia 6.4
- Gulf countries should have a clear policy regarding fertility due to their limited national demographic base. In addition, Palestine should also have a specific policy to take into consideration the Israeli occupation. In such cases, decreasing fertility may not be a suitable policy.
- "The Arab and Muslim world is currently at the heart of the transition to modernity. Some countries have already joined the European Union fertility levels: Lebanon, Tunisia, Iran, Morocco ... etc. Others just started their fertility decline: Yemen, Palestine". (Courbage 2009, p 34)

1.4 Life Expectancy

- Life expectancy increased in the Arab World as a whole, during the first decade of the 21st century: from 67.0 in 2000 to 68.9 in 2009.
- The increasing trend was observed in all countries except Iraq, where it decreased from 70.9 in 2000 to 68.2 in 2009. This is to be linked to the American military occupation of Iraq during that period.
- The high and increasing level of the life expectancy in the Gulf countries is due mainly to the improved health conditions, and the age structure of migrants, ranging in general from 20 to 50 years old.

Four countries are at the bottom, ranging from 50 to 58 years in Somalia, Djibouti, Mauritania and Sudan.

2. Education Characteristics⁸

2.1 Enrollment Rates

- Enrollment rates in Arab countries increased with time since the fifties / sixties, in the three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary.
- Youth enrollment is affected in the secondary and tertiary levels.
- The highest enrollment rates in the secondary level in 2003 are to be seen in the Gulf countries in general, the West Bank and Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon, ranging from 99 percent to 89 percent, and the lowest were in Yemen, Iraq and Djibouti: 46, 42 and 22 percent respectively.
- As with the life expectancy, the low level in Iraq should be seen in connection with the American military occupation⁹, while in Yemen and Djibouti it is related mainly to the poor economic conditions.
- Similarly in the tertiary level, the highest rates are observed in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza (ranging from 48 to 38 percent) and the lowest rates in Djibouti, Yemen and Iraq (ranging from 2 to 15 percent)
- GCC statistics are misleading due to the merging of National and Non National populations. However statistics for Saudi Arabia seem to be relatively low.

2.2 Gender Parity¹⁰

- Gender parity indices at the MENA level were increasing during 1960 – 2003: in primary from 0.48 to 0.94 respectively. It was also increasing during 1960 to 2003 in secondary (0.35 to 0.93) and tertiary levels, during 1970 - 2003 (0.42 to 1.32)
- Gender parity index in secondary increased from 0.84 to 1.07 in all countries in 2003, except Yemen 0.49, Iraq 0.66 and 0.69 in Djibouti. The high level attained by GCC countries is to be noted.
- With the exception of Yemen and Iraq, the gender parity index was high in the tertiary level, especially in the GCC countries. One may find, in general, more

⁸ Data in this section are based on Tables 5 to 10

⁹ It is to be noted that Iraq got UNESCO prize for combating illiteracy, during the nineties of the last century

¹⁰ Gender Parity is the female gross enrolment rate divided by the male gross enrolment rate. In case the sex ratio is equal to 1, the gender parity becomes the number of enrolled females divided by the number of enrolled males.

females enrolled in Arab Gulf universities than males. This reflects a high male drop out rate from secondary and tertiary education.

- "In 2000, approximately one-half of those who had some post-compulsory education dropped out before obtaining their degree. Thus, the human capital profile of MENA's adult population is quite mixed. On the one hand, the overall level of instruction of the adult population has improved considerably. On the other, education systems have evidently produced a substantial amount of school failure along the way" (World Bank 2008, p 100)
- "In addition, most governments in MENA have followed a policy of essentially free education at all levels of public instruction. Usually, university students pay a symbolic fee, which covers an insignificant proportion of outlays. With the youth bulge and the expected increase in demand for secondary and tertiary education, *this is a crisis in the making*. Policy makers need to devise education funding strategies to sustain quality and meet rising demand".(World Bank 2008, p 105)

3. Employment Characteristics¹¹

3.1 Total Labour Force Economic Participation Rate

- The total labour force economic participation rate (15 & +) increased from 50.8 in 1981 to 52.2 percent in 2009. This increase was observed in all sub regions: GCC from 52.2 to 60.4, due mainly to labour migration, Maghreb from 48.8 to 53.9 and Mashrek from 48.4 to 54.4 respectively.
- One can observe in 2009 three distinct levels of labour participation, depending on country of residence: GCC ranging from 56 per cent in Oman to 84 in Qatar, the least developed countries ranging from 70 in Djibouti, Somalia, Mauritania to 80 per cent in Comoros, and the remaining countries from 47 in Yemen to 59 per cent in Algeria.

3.2 Participation by Gender

- In 2009 the male participation rate was almost 3 times the rate for females: 77 and 26 per cent respectively.
- Female participation was very high in the least developed countries, in 2009, ranging from 57 in Somalia to 74 per cent in Comoros. This reflects the importance of the agriculture sector as well as the informal one, in these countries. In GCC the female participation rate varied from 21 in Saudi Arabia to 50 percent in Qatar, reflecting mainly the variation of the migrants by gender. Finally, the female participation rate in the remaining countries varied from 20 in Yemen to 59 per cent in Algeria.

¹¹ Data in this section are based on Tables 11 to 14.

3.3 Youth Participation

- From 1981 to 2009, the youth (15 – 24) participation rate in the Arab World was slightly over one third and decreasing from 38 in 1981 to 34 in 2009. In the GCC countries, this rate was close to one third, while in the Maghreb countries it varied from 42 in 1981 and 2009 to 44 in 2000. Finally, in Mashrek countries it remained lower than one third, decreasing from 30% in 1981 to 29% in 2000 and 2009.
- Half of young males (50.2 per cent) were economically active in 2009 compared to one fifth of females (20.8 per cent).
- With the exception of Mauritania, youth female participation rate in 2009 was very high in the least developed countries reaching almost half of the young population, while in the GCC countries this rate varied from 10 in Qatar to 34 per cent in Oman. In the remaining countries the rate varied from one tenth or less in Syria, Jordan and Iraq to a maximum of 47 in Libya and 30% in Algeria.

3.4 Total Unemployment Rate

- The total unemployment rate decreased in the Arab World during the base and latest available years¹²: from 12 to 9 per cent. This rate was very low in GCC around 5 per cent, compared to a high and decreasing rate in the Maghreb countries (22 to 12%) and a stable rate in the Mashrek countries 9 per cent.
- Female unemployment rate was always higher than the male unemployment rate, with the exception of Yemen. At the Arab wide level, male unemployment rate was 10 and 8 per cent compared to 19 and 16 per cent for females in the base and latest available years.
- "The region managed to reduce the overall unemployment rate from a level of 12% in 1990 to 9.3% by 2010, but the Arab region still holds the highest unemployment rate among developing regions" (UNDP 2011, p 5).
- "It is also important to note that unemployment is similar across income groups. Given that educational level and income per household are closely linked, this suggests that those with a higher level of educational attainment are not protected from unemployment. In some countries in the region, unemployment among the high-skilled is even higher than among those with lower levels of skills" (World Bank 2010).

¹² Data of the base years cover 1990 – 2004, and data of the latest years cover 1999 – 2009.

3.5 Youth Unemployment

- The youth unemployment rate in the Arab World decreased slightly from 29 to 24 per cent, during the base and latest available years. It was around one fourth in the three regions: GCC, Maghreb and Mashreq, in the latest available year.
- Female youth unemployment rate was in general higher than the male one: It reached more than one third of the female economically active population, compared to one fourth and one fifth of the active males, in the available base and latest years.
- "Furthermore, although declining from 30% in the 1990s, youth unemployment stood at 24% in 2009. This is more than double the global average of 11.9%, while the share of youth among unemployed populations was over 50% for most Arab countries" (UNDP 2011, p 5).

3.6 Important Notes

- "The region's incapacity to create decent employment is sometimes attributed to the low quality of education and the mismatch between educational outcomes and market demand. The report argues against this hypothesis by showing that the limited labour demand for educated workers and skills is fundamentally a demand side problem that is closely associated with the structure of output growth and investment. From this perspective, unsatisfactory labour market outcomes are primarily due to unfavorable macroeconomic conditions that inhibit investment in fixed capital and productivity growth, accompanied by inadequate growth of labour income" (UNDP 2011, p 6).
- "In today's world, characterized by intense global competition and rapid technological change, the key to prosperity is a well-educated, technically skilled workforce producing high-value-added, knowledge-intensive goods and services; in addition, they must be employed in enterprises that have the managerial capacity to find, adapt, and adopt modern, up-to-date technology and sell sophisticated goods and services in local and global markets" (World Bank 2008, p 85).

II. Towards an Integrated Social Policy for Arab Youth

- Before presenting the main steps to formulate an integrated social policy for Arab youth, let us present some main policy issues to be taken into consideration while formulating such a policy¹³.

¹³ This section is based mainly on UNDP 2011, pp 1 -14

1. Main Policy Issues

1-1 " Main message: Arab countries need a new development model

- The Arab world is richer than it is developed. Thus, the main mission of the Arab developmental state is to invest in its citizens. To this end, what is required and is feasible, is an overhaul of current social policies, sound national development plans that emphasize industrial, agricultural and trade policies, increasing labour productivity and prioritization of investment in sectors and projects that guarantee a sustainable economic and environmental base.
- Rethinking Arab development along these lines requires, in the first place, an in-depth understanding of the historical context that led to the emergence of these waves of popular uprisings. In essence, this context was shaped by the shift to “free” markets after decades of centrally managed economies, a corresponding social contract characterized by weak political participation and by ill fated national development projects. Regrettably, the corruption, which tainted political structures, affected implementation of liberal economic reform programmes, negatively impacting economic structures.
- Predominantly, oil became embedded as the prime commodity forming the backbone of the region’s trade and production with its revenues financing luxury goods and services in oil-rich economies

1-2 Rent-based governance relations

- In fact, regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with neo-liberal reforms, they could have been more palatable to Arab citizens had they been accompanied by well-targeted social protection programmes and participation of representative institutions and syndicates in a transparent dialogue between winners and losers of these reform processes. The absence of these institutions further reinforced the rentier character of the state.

1-3 Institution building and democratic governance

- Institutional weakness constitutes one of the most important causes of socio-economic and political exclusion in the Arab region. The weakness of institutions responsible for providing essential public services such as social security, health and education is a major cause of larger and cumulative development failures in terms of equitable access to opportunities for socio-economic development.
- Weak social, political and administrative accountability mechanisms as well as politically-oriented socioeconomic planning models have further perpetuated structures of neglect (of the people) and produced ostensible stability for elites oblivious to people’s social, economic, political, civic and cultural rights. Thus, lack of respect for human rights and suppression of dissent, in a context where social and economic policies favored quick-fixes rather than long-term

development solutions, effectively led to the squandering of development opportunities".

1 Formulation of an integrated Social Policy for Arab Youth.

- Taking into consideration what is mentioned above, the following concrete steps to formulate an integrated social policy for Arab Youth are suggested::
 - * 2-1. An integrated social policy for Arab Youth should be based on a comprehensive political, social and economic vision. It is important to formulate such a vision at the national level, taking into consideration national priorities and the commitments taken at the international level.
 - * 2-2. Such a vision should inspire the different policies and strategies to be formulated for a five to ten years term, and should be reviewed depending on the real progress achieved.
 - * 2.-3. Once the vision is formulated, through in depth national consultations amongst all stake holders, a national political commitment should be expressed by the highest and relevant political authority to implement this vision. Additionally, a monitoring system of the implementation process is to be put in place.
 - * 2-4 At the political level, the vision should give priority to national liberation. This is particularly true in three Arab countries which continue to witness Israeli occupation to date: Palestine, Syria (Golan Heights) and Lebanon (Shaba'a farms). Moreover, Arab countries should respect all their commitments at the international level, and should have a just and equitable relation with the big powers.
 - * 2-5. At the economic level, the vision should stress the importance of economic growth which is conducive to social development. Economic growth is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for social development and respect of human rights. International developmental experiences have shown several cases where economic growth was at the detriment of social development and human rights. The "trickle down" theory is not always implemented in practice. The case of Arab Gulf countries is very pertinent in this respect. Other Arab countries (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, etc.) also followed this pattern of economic growth without social development.
 - * 2-6. It is also important to have a clear implementation of a policy of direct taxation, proportional to income generation, at the economic level. It is worth noting that wealthy Arab countries and Lebanon for example, have a very weak direct taxation system despite the fact that in the advanced capitalist countries, direct taxation is the corner stone of state building, and there is "no representation without taxation".
 - * 2-7. Social vision should influence the formulation of six main sectorial social policies: (1) population (2) education (3) employment (4) health (5) housing, and (6)

social protection. An integrated youth social policy is therefore, directly related to social vision¹⁴.

* 2-8. As for the population policy in the Arab World, one can note two different approaches: (a) the Arab Gulf countries and Palestine, where a relatively high level of fertility should be maintained, giving at the same time, the utmost importance to the education and health status of women. The reason behind this policy is the limited national demographic base in the Gulf countries, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In the remaining countries, a decreasing level of fertility may be accepted with the exception of Lebanon and Tunisia, where the present level may be maintained.

* 2-9. Education should be given the utmost priority in formulating political, social and economic policies in the different countries of the Arab World. Education should be seen as the “key for the future”, and public education should be given the utmost importance. The Lebanese experience in the 1960’s is very significant in this respect, when the results of public high schools and the Lebanese University were much higher than the results of the “prestigious” private schools and universities. Unfortunately, this is no more the case now a days. It is very interesting to notice how these days some wealthy Gulf states have a tendency to rely more and more on private education, under the belief that private education is much better than public. This assumption is in clear contradiction with what is observed in some advanced capitalist economies like France, Canada, Scandinavian countries, etc where public education is still the main responsibility of the state.

- 2-10. Employment policy should be directly linked to the economic and education policies. Training of fresh graduates, whether from the high school or university, is to be given utmost priority. The Canadian “co –op” system is worth reviewing for duplication in the Arab countries.
- 2-11 Labour migration within the Arab World should be given the utmost priority, especially in the small Arab countries like Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, etc, where the development of the economic sectors may not be able to absorb the totality of their labour force, due to the youth bulge. Therefore, Arab labour migration should be put as a priority on the agenda of the Arab League. Unfortunately, limited success was achieved at this level since the 1960’s up to now. The Arab labour migrant to the Gulf, is still taking his decision to migrate at a purely personal level, and not through a clear strategy between his/her own country and the Gulf states

III. Main Recommendations

1. Recommendations to the concerned national authorities

¹⁴ We shall concentrate here after on three main policies only: population, education and labour.

1-1. An integrated social policy of the Arab Youth should first be linked to the political social and economic vision adopted at the national level. Such a vision should be seen from a strategic point of view, and may be amended every five to ten years.

1-2. An integrated social policy for Arab Youth should be based on a real and in depth consultation with the different stake holders in the public and private sectors and organizations of the civil society.

1-3. Once this integrated social policy of the Arab Youth is formulated, a clear political commitment should be expressed for its implementation, and a system of monitoring of its achievements should be put in place.

2. Recommendations to the Arab League

2-1. Success stories in formulating and implementing national social policies of the Arab Youth should be exchanged at the Arab level. This will facilitate the formulation of such policies in the different Arab countries.

2-2. Of particular importance is the issue of Arab labour migration to the Arab Gulf countries. This topic should be given concrete practical solutions.

3. Recommendations to UN Organizations working in the Arab World (ESCWA, UNDP, etc.) , and other International Agencies (World Bank, IMF, etc.) .

3-1. Assisting Arab countries in formulating integrated political, economic and social policies should be seen from a strategic point of view, and should be given its proper timing. Impact of social projects can not be seen in the immediate future .

3-2. Monitoring of social projects should be assessed mainly at the beneficiary level, and should not be confined at the administrative and managerial levels. The case of micro - credit projects in the region is very pertinent in this respect.

3-3. As much as possible, statistics related to the Arab World should be presented separately, they should not be mixed with other regions, ie MENA region, ESCWA region..etc. The Arab League is a political entity covering all Arab countries, and therefore statistics at the international level (UN Headquarters, ILO, UNDP...) should be published at the national as well as at Arab level.

4. Specific recommendation to the World Bank

- It is highly recommended to undertake a comparative study in the Arab countries which have followed the transition to the market economy, and which have adopted the Bank's structural adjustment programmes, to focus on the impact of this transition, and to explain to which extent this transition was conducive to the

high level of corruption observed in these countries (Libya, Egypt, Tunisia...), and what are the measures to avoid such high level of corruption in the future.

Based on the above, it is clearly evident that implementing an integrated social policy for Arab Youth is a long term process, that should be based on a clear political and socio economic vision, and should take into consideration fundamental human rights.