Arab Youth Strategising for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

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Arab Youth Strategising for the MDGs

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Foreword

No generation of young Arabs has been as large in number as today's. The Arab region is the youngest of world regions, with youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years comprising a major percentage of its population. As their numbers grow along with their exposure to the world beyond their countries' borders, Arab youth must be given a voice in providing the kinds of innovative solutions needed to address many of the most pressing problems facing their region.

In this connection, the Regional Bureau for Arab States recognizes, together with UN DESA and our partners, that youth should be consistently consulted and engaged as a powerful force for change to target and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Our commitment to empowering youth provided the incentive to organize three sub-regional workshops in 2005 in Bahrain, Morocco and Yemen. During these important forums, our approach entailed consultation with our own network of Country Offices, civil society organisations, government representatives and other multi-sectoral stakeholders actively working together towards youth empowerment.

This report is one of the outcomes of the varied, lively and often intense discussions that ensued. Through close UNDP-DESA collaboration, talented youth from across the region were identified and invited to engage in a dialogue on the seminal issues that affect Arab youth, including globalisation, media, unemployment, governance and gender equality.

In moving towards the goal of achieving the MDGs, while simultaneously addressing the region's development deficits—knowledge, freedom and women's empowerment—the participants eloquently put forth several practical recommendations. These included the creation of a Youth Observatory systematically to document and disseminate youth-related information and analysis, as well as to serve as a regional centre for youth advocacy and employment generation.

In this light, we salute the participants of these extraordinary sessions and commend our partners - civil society organisations and governments - for their ongoing efforts to advance the status of youth. Additionally, we would like to thank the experts and authors of the papers presented at the three sub-regional workshops and published within this report. We also applaud our colleagues at UNDESA and UNDP for their tireless commitment and determined efforts to realize the workshops and finalize this report.

As with all development initiatives, this report is but a drop in an ocean of ongoing work and commitment to the expressed needs of the Arab region. Towards meeting these needs, we look forward to continuing and enhancing our engagement with partners at the national, regional and international levels, to investing in human capital through innovative capacity building efforts and to realizing youth-driven development in the Arab region.

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Executive Summary

The Arab region is currently witnessing critical changes, affecting societies and individuals alike. Arab youth are experiencing firsthand the three deficits impeding the human development of the Arab world, namely freedom, knowledge and women's empowerment, as delineated in the Arab Human Development Report Series. The Arab world moreover has to confront a number of accusations, most notably involvement in terrorism, where Arab youth are, by implication, also impacted. In this context, the United Nations Development Programme/ Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP/RBAS) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) launched in a joint initiative three workshops in three different Arab countries to examine the conditions of Arab youth in light of the MDGs. The workshops, which were held in Bahrain, Sana'a and Rabat, focused on the impact of Globalisation on Arab youth, particularly in relation to the mass media, unemployment, governance, and gender. The thematic areas addressed in the workshops were also presented in various background papers and discussions, complemented by participants' debates and interventions. Experiences of Arab and European youth organisations were also shared and compared. The debates and contributions made during these workshops all seemed to affirm Jeffrey Sach's projection that "achieving the Millennium Development Goals will require a global partnership... [as] the whole world is [now] actually sharing a common destiny".

All three workshops addressed the impact of Globalisation on youth in particular and on the region as a whole. There was consensus that globalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon from which Arab countries and their youth constituencies are not isolated. Arab youth are consequently growing up exposed to a set of values that are in sharp contrast to those held by previous generations.

The consequences of globalisation on Arab youth were assessed in terms of cultural, social, economic and political dynamics. It was agreed that while youth throughout the region feel the direct cultural and economic impact of Globalisation, the social and political consequences are still in the making. Participants noted that as Globalisation infiltrated the Arab World it appeared to constitute a threat to the safeguarding of Arab heritage, which reflected directly on changing youth values and customs. This process also impacts the intellectual and artistic output of youth, which, in turn, concerns the institutions of social upbringing. The latter perceive globalised culture as a direct threat to youth identity and affiliation. The significance of this 'threat' is inversely proportional to the levels of education and economic well-being.

The workshops maintained that the cultural impact of Globalisation varies. This impact is strongly felt in larger Arab capitals in music, fashion, and rebellion against tradition. Moreover, the effects of globalisation are perceived differently in areas of high youth unemployment, or where youth occupy marginal and service-oriented jobs, wherein their concern is to meet basic daily needs.

While the negative consequences of globalisation are a source of concern in the Arab region, global media may be viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is primarily posed to governments, which are confronting rapid transformations with the influx of information and new media tools into their societies. But youth are also impacted by this massive influx of images, information and ideas through mass media, which often leaves them caught between two worlds:one realistic

and the other perhaps inaccurate and based on assumptions.

Participants stressed that globalisation represents an "opportunity" for youth to express themselves at a time of increasing pressures, allowing them to explore other cultures and experiences. Whether globalisation is a challenge, an opportunity, or both, participants emphasized that the best way for Arab youth to confront globalisation is to continue to master information and communication technology (ICT). Developing an awareness of information technology could benefit Arab youth and enhance their capabilities rather than harm them. Participants maintained that "it is the right of Arab youth to eliminate their technological illiteracy."

Unemployment was also discussed as one of the major causes of poverty, holding youth hostage at a time when they should be looking towards achieving a certain level of relative independence and perhaps marriage. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), unemployment amongst youth in the MENA region is at 12.2 percent. Other factors that perpetuate the negative impact of unemployment
are the decline of productivity combined with the low value of wages, which are further exacerbated by the additional 2.5 million youth who are, annually, entering the labour market. Furthermore, female unemployment is much higher (exceeding male unemployment by 50 percent). Unemployment rates in the MENA region range from 13 percent in Bahrain to 39 percent in Algeria, with a high 50 percent in Occupied Palestinian Territories, and 25 percent in Egypt.

Despite widespread unemployment across Arab countries, the reasons behind it differ from one country to another. In Gulf countries, for instance, there is a heavy reliance on cheap foreign labor. Privatization policies and Structural Adjustment Programmes, on the other hand, have increased unemployment rates in other Arab countries.

As the studies presented during the workshops illustrated, the economic force of Globalisation should have provided a new demand for labour. Instead, Arab markets have been inundated with imported products. Observers have remarked that promises of new job opportunities for Arab youth did not bear fruit. Furthermore, Globalisation has marginalised the underprivileged youth, –those with less education and skills- from income generating opportunities. However, the same mechanisms of global market did manage to assimilate a limited number of youth–who in turn have gained access to the modern world through their knowledge and skills.

Participants in the three workshops affirmed that there are institutional hindrances to youth unemployment. Labour markets tend to be traditional, narrowly defined and inflexible. These characteristics weaken labour mobility across the region. Additionally, the lack of effective and integrated assistance for small and medium enterprises contributes to patterns of unemployment, especially in middle income countries such as Lebanon, countries under occupation like Occupied Palestinian Territories and Iraq, and in conflict countries such as Somalia, Sudan, and Algeria.

While Regional Reports on the MDGs stressed that education and employment are pivotal to youth empowerment, the participants regarded governance as an equally necessary pillar for the development process. Democratic governance mechanisms provide an institutional framework for youth to participate in society, and manage community and state affairs.
Participants first discussed and then adopted the notion of governance detailed in the first Arab Human Development Report (2002), which defined it as: "the exercise of

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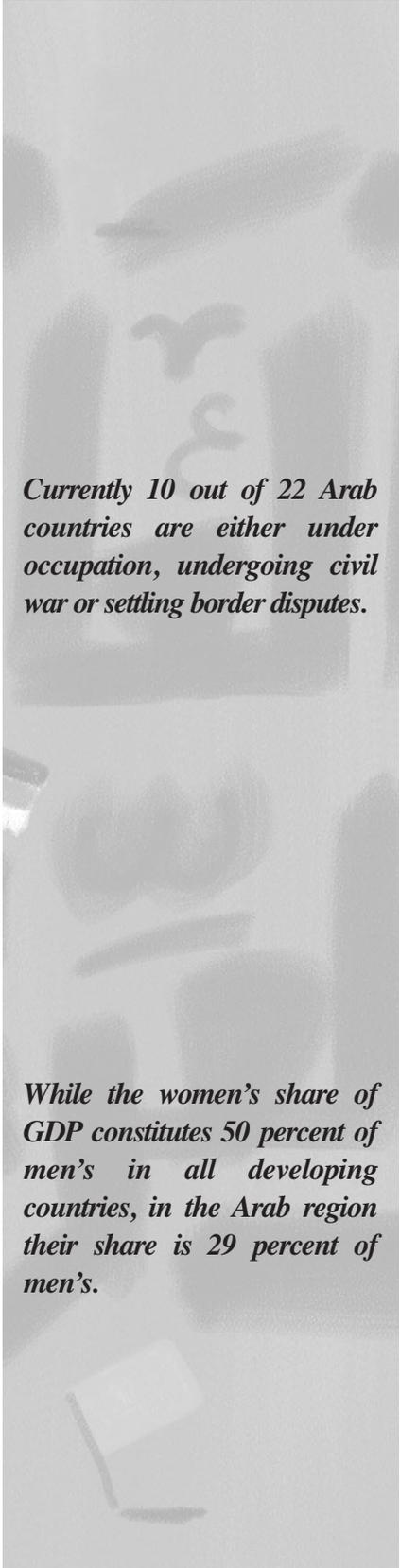
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While the women's share of GDP constitutes 50 percent of men's in all developing countries, in the Arab region their share is 29 percent of men's.

economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences". Participants maintained that the current Arab situation suffers from a crisis of youth political empowerment. This is manifested in a state of confusion and uncertainty among youth which heightens their sense of isolation, thereby preventing them from dealing constructively with challenges and real political participation. Some participants viewed the seeds of democratic governance in the available sphere of participation, encompassing elected local councils, parliaments, and effective party-based presence.

Furthermore, participants suggested several mechanisms that could enhance youth participation. Some maintained that allocating seats for young people in governing bodies is one approach that would be a temporary stepping stone to broader political participation. Another group argued that creating more space for community participation in general, with emphasis on building youth capacities, would spontaneously invigorate their inclusion.

Participants also highlighted the specific dynamics of youth and their political participation in occupied and conflict-ridden countries, where the last decade has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of youth engaged in armed conflict, both as victims and as perpetrators. Currently 10 out of 22 Arab countries are either under occupation, undergoing civil war or settling border disputes. Participants consequently stressed the need for the rehabilitation and reintegration of youth in these countries, in order to pave the way for the constructive social, economic, and political participation of youth in their respective communities.

Participants pointed out that it will take a relatively longer time to achieve young women's political empowerment, compared to that of young men, since discriminatory practices remain entrenched. In a similar vein, unemployment rates among females are higher, so that women experience the impact of poverty and illiteracy firsthand.

Furthermore, participants asserted that the most important indicators of the gender gap can be found in women's share of the GDP, which reflects the extreme poverty of Arab women. While the women's share of GDP constitutes 50 percent of men's in all developing countries, in the Arab region their share is 29 percent of men's. Such percentages decrease significantly in countries like Oman (16.6 percent) and Saudi Arabia (16.5 percent).

Participants also discussed the obstacles preventing young women from access to opportunities to enhance their lives. They particularly called for an end to violence against women, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and honour crimes, which all serve to impede woman's full enjoyment of her human rights. It was noted that early marriage can be especially damaging for entire generations, as young mothers themselves suffer from numerous physical and social challenges, which are exacerbated by their lack of education. They thus remain marginalised in any job market leaving them handicapped in their ability to support their families. Women's reproductive health problems consequently represent 12.5 percent of the total health problems in the Arab region. As of today, despite the steps taken to increase the legal marital age in some Arab countries, few have taken the appropriate measures and where laws do exist, they are often breached.

UNICEF presented a study revealing that 48 percent of those infected with HIV/AIDS are women. In most instances, the study asserts that this virus was transmitted to women

through their husbands, who have either engaged in extramarital affairs, have acquired it through polluted blood transfusions or are themselves drug addicts. Therefore, HIV/AIDS adds new burdens and challenges to the realities of young Arab women.

Recommendations

Participants unanimously advocated for a unified Arab strategy for youth to meet the MDGs. Furthermore, they urged that their concerns be included in each and every Arab Human Development Report, and that a full Report be devoted to their issues and their voices. They stressed that any Arab youth strategy should be geared towards increasing job opportunities for young people and enabling Arab youth to master communication technology, as a means of increasing employment opportunities for youth and building their capacities in this regard. They emphasized that an effective youth strategy requires inclusiveness, and support for the proliferation of democratic governance institutions in the Arab world. The strategy should also include policies targeted at developing the human capital of young people in war-torn areas.

Participants were optimistic that Arab countries still stand a good chance to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015, creating better lives for youth.

To that end, participants called for a number of concrete recommendations, including the creation of a youth portal and an Observatory to systematically document and disseminate youth-related information and analysis, as well as act as a regional center for youth advocacy and employment generation.

The Regional Bureau for Arab states in UNDP is committed to a systematic mainstreaming of youth in all its regional programme areas (governance, information and communication technologies, HIV/AIDS awareness and education) and through inter-agency partnership. UNDP's key areas of strength include its network of 18 country offices which, both independently and collectively, enable a coordinated and synergized means of partnering with key agents in any given society, and providing services to a wide constituency.

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Introduction by UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States

Nada al-Nashif
(Prepared for Publication by Azza M. Karam)

The Arab Human Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World summarized the context of Arab youth when asserting that, "...outside the academy, the world remains harsh on the young. After a student graduates, and when fate or chance ends the period of unemployment, s/he steps onto the lowest rung of a rigid, restrictive [job] hierarchy".

The first Arab Human Development Report 2002: Opportunities for Future Generations documented a worrying trend among Arab youth. According to an opinion poll of Arab youth, 51 percent of older adolescents and 45 percent of younger children interviewed, expressed a desire to emigrate, clearly indicating dissatisfaction with current conditions and future prospects in their home countries.

On conventional indicators of human development, the Arab world has indeed made significant strides during the past several decades. Arab life expectancy has increased by 15 years and infant mortality rates have dropped by two thirds. Female literacy has expanded threefold, while female primary and secondary enrolment has doubled. Strikingly, economic growth to a significant extent is "pro-poor" and the region exhibits less extreme poverty at the dollar-a-day per capita level, than any other developing region. Nevertheless, as the first Arab Human Development Report demonstrated, the region is "richer" than "developed." It demonstrates that the region trailed behind others and confirmed that a deficit in freedom is stifling creativity; that a deficit in women's empowerment is crippling half of Arab societies; and that a deficit in knowledge is shackling the region's potential.

Challenges Facing Arab Youth

Youth constitute the largest age group among the population of the Arab states region. Youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years old represent nearly 20 percent of the populations (or exceed that number) in several countries (i.e. Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen). Given their vast numbers, youth are often exposed to the detrimental impacts of poverty and labour markets eschewed by the impact of Globalisation (dramatically reflected in 10 million unemployed Arab youths, between the ages of 18 and 25), and unmet expectations, due in part to the evolving dynamics of family structures and fanned by technology and the global media.

Some argue that Arab societies lack the proper structures and resources for organizing youth activism, whether through volunteerism, recreational activities, or networking opportunities. Others emphasize that the particular impact of

unemployment, compounded by deteriorating public education is the crux of the problem facing youth today.

Whatever the specific cause, most would agree that slow democratization is a hindrance to youth well-being and advancement. The Arab Human Development Report 2004 argues that governments should provide young people with political space in the public arena, especially on issues of education, employment and personal freedom. As a first step, Arab countries should ratify the 15 major international legal instruments adopted by intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system relating to the human rights of youth. Most Arab countries have ratified less than seven of the conventions, including Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, have not ratified any of the 15 conventions.

Empowering youth, however, is not just an issue for governments. The 2004 Arab Human Development Report also highlights the fact many Arab civil society organisations (CSOs) contribute to dis-empowering youth as a result of their own undemocratic mobilisation. As a consequence, Arab youth suffer from an inability to express their perspectives on policies and programmes that affect their lives.

Youth and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Global youth feature as critical constituencies, and agents, under the international umbrella of an MDG campaign committed to realizing eight goals by 2015: (1) eradicating poverty; (2) eliminating illiteracy; (3) empowering women; (4) reducing child mortality; (5) improving maternal health; (6) combating HIV/AIDS; (7) ensuring environmental sustainability; and (8) developing global partnerships for development. Achieving these goals will depend a great deal on youth involvement. After all, the youth of today will live with either the failure or the success of the MDGs, hence our clear mandate to work with them towards these targets.

To assist Arab countries in their efforts to achieve the MDGs, the Regional Bureau for Arab States operates six regional programmes in the areas of: governance; ICT for development; HIV/AIDS; women's empowerment through research; and quality assurance in education. In each of these programmes, youth represent a critical constituency and therefore a principal partner in implementation.

Summarizing the progress of the Arab region on meeting MDGs with respect to youth, the United Nations report, The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2005, notes that:

"The Arab region is slowly advancing towards achieving full literacy among the young adults aged 15-24. Starting from a regional average of 67 per cent in 1990, 77 per cent of the region's youngsters were literate by 2000. Out of 20 countries, 12 will likely achieve

In the League of Arab States Tunis Declaration, the leaders of the region committed themselves to the development of this critical human resource by "consolidating comprehensive development programmes and intensifying efforts aimed at promoting educational systems, at disseminating knowledge and encouraging its acquisition, and at fighting illiteracy in order to ensure a better future for the Arab young generations."

The workshops examined the contribution of governments in formulating sound youth policies, and the roles of youth organizations and NGOs, in conjunction with the public and private sector.

universal youth literacy by 2015. Eight others are advancing at slower rates and they include some of the most populous countries. Extra momentum is needed in Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Yemen, and especially the Comoros and Mauritania, where slow advancement entrenches already existing low literacy rates."

The 2005 MDG report also stresses that in several countries, eliminating rural illiteracy remains a key priority, while noting that in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia there exists an illiteracy rate among rural adolescents that is twice the level for their urban counterparts. The report cautions that extra investment is needed to obtain better statistics on MDG trends.

Ultimately, the prosperity of Arab societies tomorrow will depend upon investing in the success of Arab youth today. Arab youth are a rich source of the kinds of innovative solutions needed to address many of the most pressing problems facing our world. More involved and effectively mobilized Arab youth means higher numbers of informed and concerned Arab constituencies, thus more space for democratic practices in the Arab region.In the League of Arab States Tunis Declaration, the leaders of the region committed themselves to the development of this critical human resource by "consolidating comprehensive development programmes and intensifying efforts aimed at promoting educational systems, at disseminating knowledge and encouraging its acquisition, and at fighting illiteracy in order to ensure a better future for the Arab young generations."

A Series of Arab Regional Workshops: Objectives, Intended Outcomes and Ongoing Commitments

The workshop series entitled "Arab Youth Strategising for the MDGs" was held in three Arab countries with the objective of exploring the complex economic, social, political and other factors impacting on Arab youth development in the context of the MDGs. Particular emphasis was placed on the impact of globalisation, employment, gender dynamics (including the participation of young women in public life), governance, and political participation.

What took place was a unique opportunity to facilitate much needed dialogue around the MDGs between youth, governments and broader civil society actors. The workshops examined the contribution of governments in formulating sound youth policies, and the roles of youth organizations and NGOs, in conjunction with the public and private sector. In assessing and selecting the appropriate instruments, the workshops also examined how youth policies and strategies address issues such as the social integration of youth, nationalization of the labour force, creation of employment opportunities for youth, and models for youth political participation.

The workshops discussed useful models, case studies and best practices which could be examined by government ministries, NGOs, and other stakeholders, in building and maintaining a system of sound youth development policies and strategies. Another critical outcome of these workshops was the concrete recommendations for UN agencies, governments and Arab civil society to better serve the needs of a growing and dynamic youth population.

The results of the workshops are documented in this publication which will feed into and inspire the formulation and discussion of concrete youth programmes. Among UNDP's existing programmes in the Arab region are the following:

Jordan - The National Youth Corp (NYC)

NYC is a pioneering project launched by UNDP aimed at involving a vital segment of the population - youth - in the development process of their country. NYC seeks to instil the spirit of the social integration advocated in the World Social Summit (1995) and enhance productivity within society through voluntary involvement of youth at the local level. The NYC forms a network of trained volunteers possessing the ability of work in diverse socio-economic settings.

Egypt - ICT Youth Capacity Building Project

Through its partnership, UNDP helped the Egyptian government to define a vision for the use of ICT and its underlying technologies to accelerate human development. This vision includes increasing employment opportunities in the communications and information technology sectors and building an information society capable of contributing solutions to fight poverty. The ICT Trust Fund programme focuses on six projects: (1) the community development portal; (2) IT for illiteracy eradication; (3) the mobile internet unit; (4) community e-library initiative for all; (5) smart schools; and (6) an IT clubs franchise scheme.

Yemen - Labour Market Information and System (LMIS)

The main purpose of LMIS during the second phase is to develop strategies and targets for employment generation and technical and vocational training by building on LMIS outputs achieved during the first phase. The second phase is also contributing to enlargement of partnership between key actors (government institutions, private sector and academic institutions) in the areas of human resource development in order to ensure balance between outputs of the education sector and demand of the labour sector, the programme's second phase completion date is 2006.

All of the programmes conceptualized and implemented by UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States recognize both the needs and involvement of youth, as part of ongoing efforts to develop the capacities and advocate for prosperous and wealthy Arab societies. On the part of UNDP, we are keen to see the recommendations of this report mainstreamed into our programmes, thus effectively realizing the power of our region's future.

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Editor's Introduction:
Those who Transform, Adapt

Gihan Abou-zeid

Youth are the hope of the future, the force and the promise of tomorrow. They are an eloquent testimony to the grim realities of today. What characterizes the hopes of Arab youth? What actions can possibly improve their reality to bring in a more equitable millennium?

The three youth workshops held in Bahrain, Sana'a and Rabat sought to find answers to some of these complex questions through five main working papers addressing the impact of globalisation on Arab youth, and examining ways to achieve the MDGs. In view of this, it is imperative to thoroughly examine the lives of youth in the Arab region, whether in relatively safe or threatened spaces, in rich or in poor areas.

Introduced as a launching pad for further studies and discussions, the working papers link the reality of Arab youth with progress towards the achievement of the MDGs, which seek to reduce poverty and improve the lives of millions across the globe. The background papers monitor the impediments to the active engagement of youth, particularly in relation to youth-specific policies. The latter are often the result of global economic trends in developing countries, which ultimately contribute to extreme poverty among youth, especially among young women. Additionally, the papers shed light on the political and economic reality of the Arab media and its impact on youth.

The first working paper addresses youth and globalisation. Broadly, several definitions of globalisation were introduced including a functional one which stresses the features, manifestations and achievements brought about by the introduction of unprecedented technological progress, communication and information advancements; the establishment of robust transnational companies, and the changes created by a global market which secures a free flow of capital, services, goods, and human labour. Another definition of globalisation is a structuralist one, which perceives it as an advanced stage in the growth of capitalism - itself transcending national borders through transnational companies. In such circumstances, globalisation - with its intrinsic capitalist structure - is founded on the discrepancies and inequalities of development at both the national and international levels.

The first paper addresses the impact of globalisation on Arab youth in middle, poor, rural, and urban societies, maintaining that cultural repercussions of globalisation are the most far-reaching. The simplest of these repercussions are manifest in shifts in the value paradigm for some young people. The paper, in addition, draws distinctions between the impact of globalisation on male and female youth. It concludes that globalisation provides an opportunity for women to move beyond some of the traditional shackles. However, these opportunities are actually obtained with much difficulty. The paper also tackles the social effects of globalisation specifically the impact on the Arab family. Clearly, changing relations within the family structure exist as a reflection of the overwhelming confusion seizing the region as a whole. The economic benefits of globalisation, moreover, are observed through the inclusion of a limited category of youth with the vast majority left on the periphery. The poor are driven deeper into poverty where governments no longer provide them with their essential needs. . The paper then tackles some aspects of the political impact of globalisation and addresses potential changes in the balance of power.

The economic benefits of globalisation are observed through the inclusion of a limited category of youth with the vast majority left on the periphery.

The paper on youth and the media considers media as the main tool for Globalisation. A media without borders creates a multiplier effect in the areas of finance, investment, trade, news, culture, and the environment. The free flow of information dealing with political, recreational, and commercial issues has brought outside influences to the region at a much faster pace then previous years.

This paper also addresses the complex relationship between Arab youth and global media and communications. As a result of a new transparency and the amazing power of information dissemination, Arab youth are encountering deep frustrations. Evidently, Arab youth feel despair when faced with corruption and exclusionary local politics. Ultimately, Arab youth embrace the global media as a way of accessing forbidden information and unleashing their rebellious instincts against patriarchy. The author of the paper argues that modern media has granted youth the right to expression and choice - a far-fetched opportunity for many youth.

Highlighting its advantages, the paper maintains that global media present youth with a broad spectrum of ideas, enriching youth culture and enabling them to interact with other cultures and societies. Conversely, with access to global media, youth are caught in between two worlds - the national and the international. The paper finally contends that the media in its current form will be able to galvanize various social groups inside Arab societies, around a diverse set of issues after many years of seclusion and disintegration.

The paper on youth and the labour market draws a link between unemployment and the political, social, and economic conditions in the Arab Region. It notes the decline in youth activity in labour markets, with 12.5 million unemployed Arab youth. The authors highlight unemployment rates in various Arab countries and describe how they are products of the political and economic conditions of Arab states. The authors pinpoint the necessity of devising an overall policy for youth employment, arguing that partnerships with governmental agencies, youth organisations, and other concerned groups will enable all to play a much-needed collective role in policy formulation. The paper also details the importance of targeting females in labour market integration strategies.

The paper on youth and governance proposes a framework for analyzing the role of Arab youth in establishing institutions that practice good governance and promote freedoms in their capacity as key actors and beneficiaries. Recommendations are made to enhance youth participation in reform processes. The conceptual framework of this paper is anchored in the common reference to low levels of political empowerment for youth in Arab countries. The author describes five main states (confusion, seclusion, division, conflict, and uncontrollability) encapsulating the crisis of youth participation in political life, and acting as a means to compare similarities and differences across Arab countries.

The paper cites three different approaches to youth empowerment. The idealist approach maintains that the challenges confronting youth reflect those of society at large. Accordingly, the empowerment of youth is enabled in the context of the empowerment of society as a whole. In contrast, the utilitarian approach deems these challenges as distinct from those of society. Based upon this premise, special attention should be given to youth-driven services while accepting an environment marked by little democracy. The third approach is the elitist approach, which is cantered on the mantra of "change before empowerment." In the latter view, priority
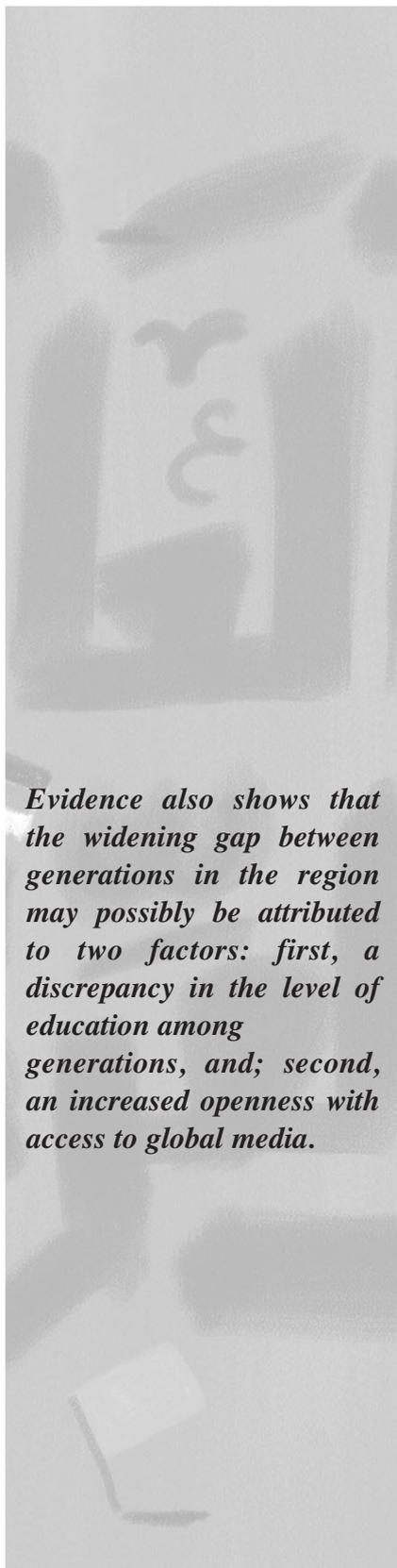
is given to changing youth culture as a means to develop the capacity needed for embracing more democracy and freedoms. The author finally proposes what he terms as the realist approach, which places the viewpoints of the stakeholders themselves, i.e. the youth, as central. Empowerment, from this vantage point, is a right that youth give meaning to, and to be granted by the state.

Another paper on family and gender relations also tackles broad dynamics related to reproductive health in the region. The authors acknowledge at the very beginning that the Arab world currently stands at a unique demographic juncture. The increase in the fertility rate over recent years has led to a huge jump in the population between the ages of 10 and 24; the unprecedented growth of this age cohort is sometimes called the "youth bulge". The repercussions of this problem, however, have not been extensively examined, especially in the context of the rapid social changes in the region, namely the advancement in education, urbanization, and the change in family structure. The region also lacks a sufficient amount of updated and youth-focused research. Only recently were some databases completed based on demographic samples of married and single youth. In light of the cultural context in the region, any analytical study of the welfare of youth should take the institution of marriage into consideration. Current evidence indicates that this institution undergoes serious upheavals. Although the phenomenon of early marriage is becoming less common, it is still observed in almost all societies. The legal marriage age is quickly rising in some areas. Other phenomena include a rapid increase in the number of unmarried women and a frenzied revival of some forms of informal marriages, like the urfi (customary) marriage.

Evidence also shows that the widening gap between generations in the region may possibly be attributed to two factors: first, a discrepancy in the level of education among generations, and; second, an increased openness with access to global media.

Evidence also shows that the widening gap between generations in the region may possibly be attributed to two factors: first, a discrepancy in the level of education among generations, and; second, an increased openness with access to global media. Despite the coherent structure of Arab families, members inside these families are still largely categorized on the basis of age and gender. Regarding sexual and reproductive health, evidence states that the major burden is still shouldered by the female. However, male youth are not able to obtain the required information or services. It is further noted that policies in the Arab region fall short and do not address the region's social changes or adequately respond to the needs of youth. Though a few creative programmes have been designed to serve the needs of youth, an accurate assessment on the effectiveness and reach of the programmes is urgently needed to determine their ultimate success.

The following pages contain the working papers presented in the three workshops. It should be noted that each subsequent presentation and iteration of the papers reflected the interventions of the various participants and was enriched with the views of the youth participants.
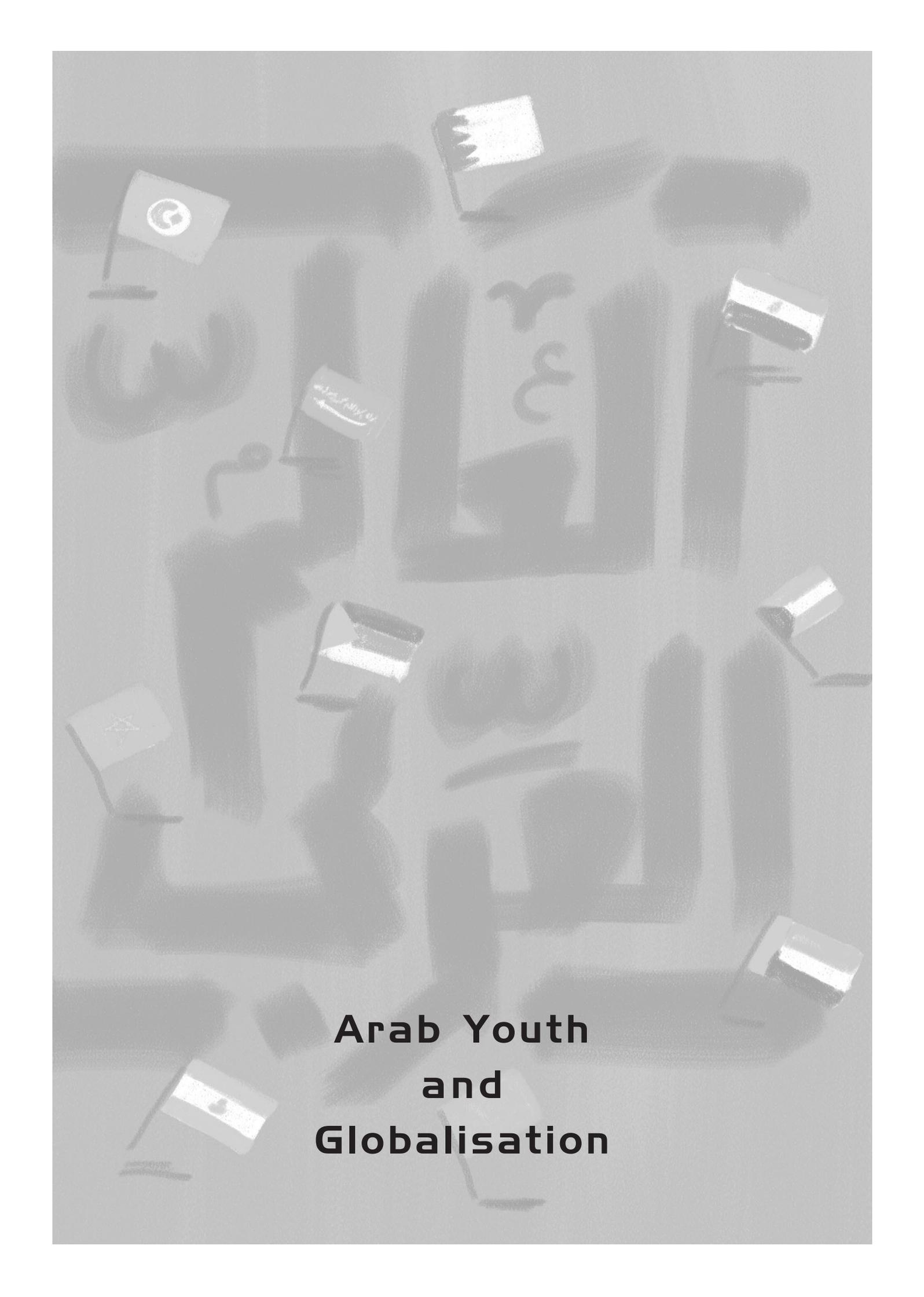
Arab Youth
and
Globalisation

Arab Youth and Globalisation

Gihan Abou-zeid

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the phenomenon of globalisation has become crystallized through a number of policies aimed at achieving certain strategic goals, including the reformation of the economic system into a global market economy. In pursuit of this objective, globalisation's political, social, cultural and military mechanisms all have bearings on the Arab region. Subsequently, Arab governments are adopting policies and programs in support of globalisation in a manner that extends to the local/national levels.

Competing perspectives have triggered a number of definitions for Globalisation that are summarized here under two approaches: the functional and the structural. The functional approach focuses on a description of the manifestations, characteristics and achievements of globalisation: unprecedented technological progress, an information and communications revolution, robust and active transnational companies, and circumstances conducive to a global market that secures a free movement of capital, services, goods, and human labour. **(1)**

The ideological and cultural discourse pertaining to this definition is a manifest in the belief that globalisation is an indication of the victory of Western capitalism; hence, this marks the 'end of history'. The inevitable nature and irresistible power of globalisation is moving the entire world towards becoming a global village. Societies that seek to survive the rising wave must tailor their realities to integrate into a unified global market. **(2)**

The recipe for this integration is represented in structural adjustment policies and financial stabilization packages formulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Most Third World countries were required to adopt these policies to escape the debt crisis during the 1980s.

Proponents of this view focus on realizing political and economic freedoms, promoting liberal democracy, enhancing the role of the civil society, and reducing the role of the State to that of a bystander. They effectively favour joining the system and 'reaping the fruits' of globalisation. However, they ignore conflicts of interest, and the imbalance of economic and political power resulting from developmental and structural disparities which hinder participation in globalisation on an equal footing. Furthermore, supporters of integration overlook the potential for marginalisation, and even annihilation, by some societies as a result of tribal, racial, and religious tensions inflamed by globalisation. In Darwinian terms, such conflicts serve the interests of the fittest - i.e. the super powers.

The structuralist definition of globalisation, on the other hand, focuses on the manner in which it has developed institutionally in contemporary times. This viewpoint approaches globalisation as a historical dialectical process; representing an advanced stage in the evolution of human history in as far as the accumulation of scientific and technological knowledge is concerned. globalisation, according to the structuralist definition, is not the end of history, rather a progressive stage in the growth of

capitalism. This growth is enabled - and manifested - through transcending national borders, primarily through multinational corporations. globalisation therefore, with its intrinsic capitalist structure, is grounded in the discrepancies and inequalities of societal development. Consequently, it gives rise to a new (international) division of labour based on disparities in military, political, and social power.

Advocates of the structuralist view assert that globalisation has a simultaneous effect of both isolation and inclusion at the local and international levels. The rationale of capitalist expansion, they add, will ultimately aggravate inequality among different partners. Developing countries can cope with the dominant mechanisms of globalisation only if they manage to liberate themselves from these inequalities. This, in turn, can only be achieved when developing countries relate to the global market through their nationally-driven development requirements, rather than through policies imposed on them. **(3)**

However, the structuralist perspective is not that disengagement is isolation from or denial of globalisation. Rather, it implies that developing countries attempt to become active agents in the process of globalisation on their own terms. globalisation, in turn, needs to be made to adapt and respond to the developmental needs of these countries. The structural definition further considers that one-sided efforts of "adaptation' forcefully imposed on developing countries, would inevitably result in the marginalisation - or even the elimination - of the weakest parties. The structuralist approach therefore, is not about poverty reduction, but its eradication entirely through the formulation of well-developed and targeted strategies.

It is noteworthy that a more humane approach to globalisation is adopted by UN organisations. This revolves around a belief in the inevitability of the varied impacts of globalisation, while acknowledging the need to 'humanise' its consequences. Subsequently, international organisations address the negative impacts of globalisation on societies at large, and on certain marginalised groups, including developing strategies and programmes to reduce poverty and empower the poor.

One such programme is the UN Millennium Project geared towards investing in development. Characteristically, the Millennium Project ambitiously embarks on the elimination of all obstacles and challenges to development in the Third World. Adopting a set of goals, namely the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), this Project seems to advocate something close to the structural definition of globalisation. The first recommendation of the UN Project is that all countries should have development strategies by 2006.

There is an increased awareness of the vital role of youth in future development processes, and a series of local, regional, and international programs and projects have been introduced with the objective of empowering this constituency. The UN Millennium Project welcomes and encourages a global struggle against extreme poverty, and seeks to empower developing countries, so that they can mobilize and build human capital - starting with youth.

The Environment of Arab Youth

It is worth mentioning that the effects and impact of globalisation in Arab societies act as complementary and interacting variables in the comprehensive context of globalisation. Arab youth live in a societal structure that enforces the suppression of

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their freedom. The complex structure of Arab societies may be described as a series of chained rings. The journey through the structure starts with a child's upbringing within the family. It continues with educational institutions, and from there, to the world of work and increased exposure to the formative elements of society. The structure is complete when internal and external politics impact the life of youth. Throughout this journey, each link in the chain diminishes a portion of youth freedom and delivers the individual to the next chain, which in turn, further decreases their share. The combined effect of this intricate structure is efficient in a coercive way. **(4)**
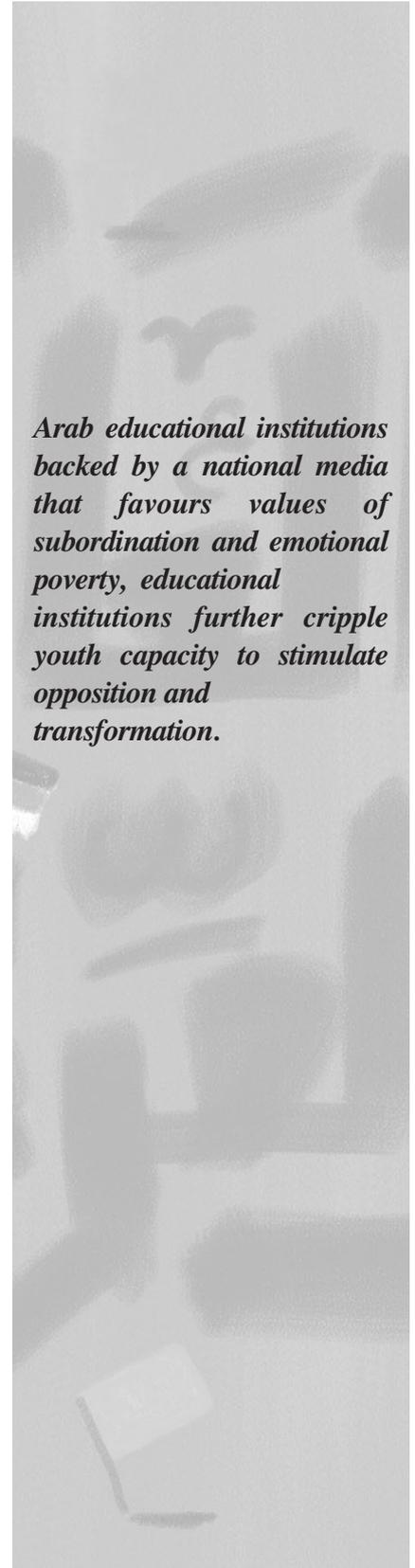
The official religious discourse is perceived by some to be superficial. This – among other factors – provides a fertile ground for the emergence of relatively more 'credible' religious currents and groups. Secular education systems, which co-exist and intersect with religious ones, adopt obsolete methods that place emphasis on repetition and memorization. Cultural and artistic productions as presented through the media magnify these stark deficiencies. At the same time, several alternative ideological currents which sought to provide different perspectives, failed to capture the hearts and minds of youth. Indeed, many of these currents have been unable to gain popularity for decades, despite repeated and persistent efforts. They remain confined within minds, books, journals, or in the halls of symposia and seminars.

Arab educational institutions endorse rote-learning and subjugation. Open dialogue and creative learning are totally absent from these institutions, thus impeding freedom of thought and criticism, backed by a national media that favours values of subordination and emotional poverty, educational institutions further cripple youth capacity to stimulate opposition and transformation.

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Arab youth live in countries where, on the whole, discrimination is the norm. A culture of tribalism, for instance, discriminates on the basis of wealth, access to resources, and power. Distinguished and large families hold the reins of authority. Moreover, the rich, with their wealth, control the destinies of the poor. Modernized urban areas discount the needs of the poorer rural towns, which in turn overlook the needs of smaller villages. Men are better off than women. Poor women have the least access to resources and thus emerge as the least respected. Similarly, discrimination is widely felt by people with disabilities, who constitute approximately ten per cent of Arab societies.

Arab youth receive, on a daily basis, messages from the media, which compete with those of the educational institutions. The messages are directed to youth in their capacity as the "consumers" of all cultural and material goods shaping a prevailing exclusive lifestyle. Clearly, the target of these messages is financially capable youth who have high purchasing power. Nevertheless, versions of these material products quickly emerge for those with more limited incomes. By the same token, restricting certain spaces to the rich (such as private beaches and universities) occurs at the same time that some cultural features (such as languages and song tunes) are being widely reformulated and regurgitated. **(5)**

Arab youth do not represent a homogenous group. According to the 2003 Arab Human Development Report entitled *Building a Knowledge Society* differences among Arab youth relate to the different environments of the countries of the Arab world. Arab countries with high rates of human development (as per the United
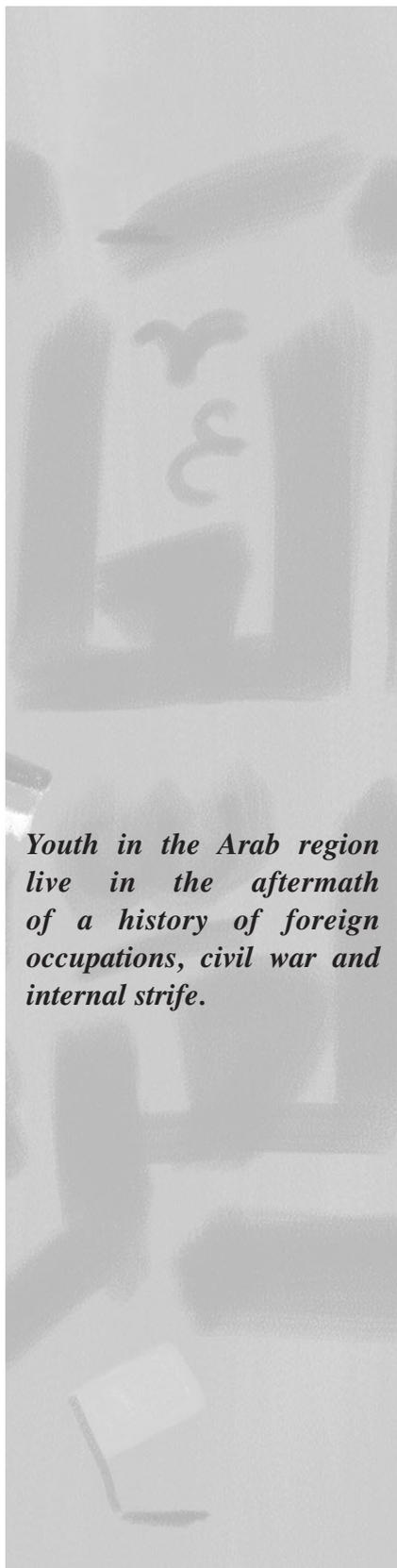
Nations Human Development Index of 2003) include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE. On the global level, Bahrain ranks in the top tier among the 55 countries. The majority of Arab countries (13 countries) fall in the medium human development range (with a total of 86 countries), starting with Libya and ending with Sudan. Those that are rated as having low human development include three Arab ones: Yemen, Djibouti and Mauritania.

The tools of globalisation, in light of available data, are in most cases only available for the elite and some segments of the middle class. To illustrate, according to the 2002 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), only eighteen computers are available in the Arab world per 1000 people in comparison to an international average of 78.3 per 1000. The AHDR further documents that the number of internet users in the region constitute merely 1.6 percent of the total population, i.e. only 4.2 million people. Despite the discrepancy in the number of internet users (with the highest usage in the Gulf area) Arab countries in general record the lowest rates in this respect. This low number of internet users can be explained in light of the high illiteracy rates in the region (AHDR 2002 estimates it at 60 million illiterate adults); and the fact that using the internet often requires knowledge of the English language - the dominant language of the cyber world. Over and above, the low-income status of the majority of the Arab population also limits their access to the internet.

At present, Arab youth live in largely despotic political contexts. This despotism cloaks itself in many garbs. Such that dissension is legitimate when it allows the regime to breach the rule of law. Customs and traditions are also viable when they support the historical legitimacy, sustainability and succession of power, thereby providing the ruling elite with the opportunity to wilfully manipulate the social, economic, and political landscape. As a consequence of these abuses, citizenship and social accountability are arbitrarily distorted.

Youth in the Arab region live in the aftermath of a history of foreign occupations, civil war and internal strife. Ranging from occupation - and the resistance thereto - for more than half a century in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to a new occupation in Iraq. Two wars raged in the Gulf region, while internal tensions continue to smoulder in Lebanon and in Sudan. External political and economic pressures are peaking in Arab countries while Arab political regimes haphazardly grant the rights of expression, transformation and the exercise of citizenship. Undeniably, all this directly impacts youth; and indirectly influences their long-term capabilities as well as social structures and collective consciousness.

Given all these exposures, it can be safely said that youth inherit the complete legacy of their forefathers with all its abundances and shortcomings in terms of economic, social, and cultural capital. Mechanisms of social re-production transfer this legacy across generations through the family and the school. It sometimes seems as though the social positions of today's youth are predetermined, and they are carrying baggage designed to consolidate rigid social mechanisms. More precisely however, youth, like other segments of society, deal with a structure of 'socially available opportunities' which are unevenly distributed, to either enhance or limit their capacity for negotiation. **(6)**

Arab Youth Today

The word 'generation' does not merely cover youth of the same age group, rather, it more adequately refers to the commonality of their formative experiences. At the same time, generically addressing the issues of youth does not deny their diverse social and economic backgrounds. On examining the disparities in the lives of youth inside Arab countries, it

Youth in the Arab region live in the aftermath of a history of foreign occupations, civil war and internal strife.

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becomes evident that patterns are far from consistent. Here, it is sufficient to reveal one aspect, namely the share of 20% of the poorest, of consumption or of income. In some Arab countries, this share does not exceed 8.6 percent (Egypt) in the best instances. This share is 5.7 percent in Tunisia, and falls between these two figures in Algeria, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Yemen (UNDP 2003).

It has become difficult to refer to the entirety of 'Arab youth' except in passionate political oratory reiterating hollow phrases alluding to youth as the main 'pillar of the nation', or as 'half the present and all of the future'. Conversely, in political discourse revolving around security, youth are often referred to as the 'dangerous elements of society.' Amidst such rhetoric, the term 'youth' inevitably requires more specificity rather than generalization. **(7)**

The 2002 Arab Human Development Report concluded that the stumbling blocks for Arab countries are not linked to income. The main obstacle, according to the Report, is the inability of Arab countries to convert income into human development. The Arab Human Development Report also reveals that the disparity among Arab countries is almost as large as that for the entire world. This pattern is applicable to Arab youth and the discrepancy in the quality of their lives, specifically in education, health, and job opportunities. **(8)**

The population in the Arab world is younger than most of the world's population.
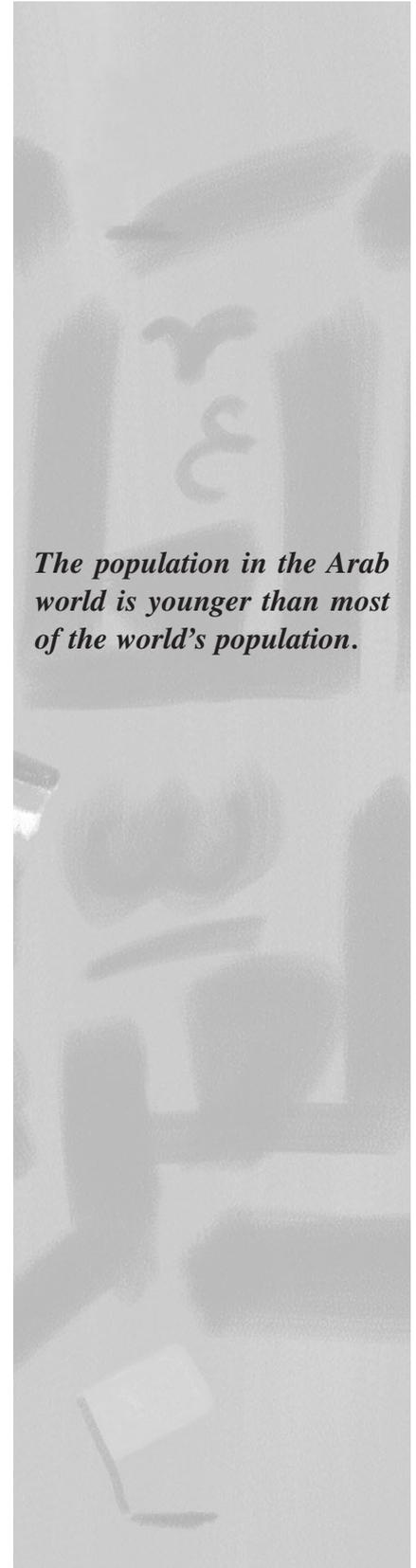
The population in the Arab world is younger than most of the world's population. The following section tackles the environment of Arab youth, as a prelude to the study of the impact of globalisation in specific areas. In this context, youth can be divided into three major categories:

The first category is part of the economically rich segments of the society which can afford the best education and information tools. Accordingly, job opportunities are within easy grasp for this category. These youth are given the opportunity to master foreign languages and can deftly use information technology in accomplishing tasks and honing skills. As a result, this group has vast means at their disposal to network on the international level. They do not suffer a cultural shock from the values disseminated through satellite television. On the contrary, those values influence several facets of life for these privileged youth - their appearance, behaviours, music, cars, as well as their relationship with their families and with the opposite sex.

Globalisation provides this category with new luxuries and better tools for knowledge, education, and entertainment. While globalisation grants these youth a wider array of experiences and huge communication capacities, it weakens their link to their countries. The local arena is characterized by a void that can never capture the attention of youth and is ultimately overshadowed by modern technology. This state can be called "optional seclusion".

The second category comprises youth who are given the chance to obtain various educational certificates, but are deprived of the vocational skills and knowledge that would open avenues for jobs. This explains the fact that 53 percent of job hunters in the Arab world are youth aged 15 to 25 years old, according to the 2002 Arab Human Development Report.

This category includes rural and urban youth, who are more highly educated and who can access satellite television more than the internet as access to the former is easier than the latter. Youth in this category receive values of globalisation through

watching satellite channels and imitating the behaviours of their peers in the first group. Thus, the culture of this category has changed and some have managed to break religious taboos like the 'urfi marriage. Youth in this category develop an awareness of the challenges of the labour market, and many, especially in populous countries, tend to juggle employment with studies. Dreams of wealth and consumerism crowd the lives of these youth.

These youth take a middle route in their relations with their families in the sense that they are less rebellious than their peers of the first category. They openly show some loyalty to their families and secretly break all possible fetters of tradition. Girls in this category are seen wearing the modern hijab (headscarf for Muslim women), whereby some will cover part of their hair and can be dressed in fashionable and tight clothes. Clearly, youth here persistently endeavour to strike a balance between foreign and local cultures while abiding by certain rules.

However, the majority among this category of youth feels the misery and malaise present in their society. They are the backbone and the engine behind the demonstrations taking place at national universities condemning some of the local policies (as in Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan). Youth, as the largest age group in the Arab region, are the fuel that ignites consumerist trends, wielding purchasing power for the products brought by globalisation. If the internal cultural conflict remains latent inside the first category, it is rather conspicuous in this second category, especially when it concerns the search for identity.

Youth of the second category belong to the middle class, with all its distinctive features reflecting the local culture. Nader Fergany, an Egyptian social scientist and lead author of the first series of the AHDRs, describes this category as follows: "it is a vague social category that lies in the middle... It is haunted by social tension and relative annihilation as a result of a state of the impoverishment afflicting Arab economies." He adds, "this middle category tends to work on issues of advancement when the nation is at an ebb. It mostly represents the potent force among Arab CSOs, especially human rights' organisations. It is also the target of governmental bodies which continuously seek to create divisions among them." **(9)**

The third category of youth describes those who are entrenched in the quagmire of poverty and negligence - especially those living in rural and/or poor urban areas and in shanty towns. Youth are either totally deprived of new technology or are active consumers of the global media. This category differs in size from one country to another. The gravest dilemma for this category is their intense exposure to new values presented by their peers from other categories. As a result, youth are swept up in the desire to uncritically imitate their peers. The technology of globalisation spawns a sense of inferiority and deprivation amongst youth in this category, even throwing some into the clutches of despair or violence. Herein are the main recruits for crime, drugs, and organised violence.

This category is strictly caught between impossible aspirations and crippled capacities. It bears the negative economic repercussions of globalisation, and only benefits from any impact of global culture almost by mistake, or through a 'stolen opportunity'.

Dr. Zeinab Abdou, Professor of Sociology, and a member of the Faculty of Social Service at the University of Helwan, conducted research in Egypt in 2004 on youth problems in shanty towns which highlighted the following:

1 percent of the sample is on drugs; 17 percent are accused of crimes of theft; 22 percent have been sentenced in other cases; and 56 percent is illiterate. Thus, the cultural claims of globalisation are only a provocation for these youth. Their encounters with globalisation tend to be with its less moral behavioural features. Indeed, globalisation does not even recognize their existence.

Implications of Globalisation

The repercussions of globalisation - specifically from a structuralist point of view - accumulate over an established and well-defined framework. Representing an advanced stage in human history, globalisation builds on previous stages, and interacts with existing features to evolve new patterns and dimensions.

Cultural Implications

The Arab world features a rich cultural heritage whose roots run as deep as the history of the region. This heritage has varied human sources (Arabs, Turks, Berbers, Caucasians, Africans and Persians), and numerous religious roots (Islamic, Christian and Jewish). Diverse civilizations have exerted influence upon this heritage (Pharaonic, Roman, Greek, Islamic, etc.). In addition, its geographic location adds further defining traits to Arab culture.

However, the cultural power of this heritage has not deeply penetrated the fabric of existence in the Arab world, especially among youth; this can be attributed to several complex factors, the most obvious of which are long years of occupation that still haunt some Arab countries in the region. In their pursuit of liberation, Arab countries largely overlooked the importance of establishing a cultural project that could counter the dominant culture of the former colonizer, to sow the seeds of an alternative future for the nation. This gave rise to the perplexing question of 'identity' - one among many serious questions commonly triggered in the wake of colonization and occupation.

Questions of 'identity' and 'the nation state' remained unanswered during the Arab attempt at independent statehood after a long period of military occupation. Eventually, the Arab region became absorbed in the challenges of achieving development and modernization, eradicating poverty, and building free societies.

This unfortunate condition leaves Arab youth with two options. Either to rebel against their culture which runs deep in their blood, or to become addicted to it; or to attempt both and become somewhat schizophrenic.

The mechanisms of globalisation, especially the cultural ones, have reached Arab youth. In practice, media is deemed the most influential of these. Some may argue that the media is the most powerful arm of globalisation, with a country like the United States (US) producing 60 percent of global TV transmission. This would mean that it has the power to propagate values and concepts such that global media basically markets the infinite potentials of the US. As a result, other minor entities that are still in their early stages of development are viewed as inferior. The African continent, including the Arab countries in North Africa, has 1.4 per cent of the TV stations; and produces 1.8 per cent of the books published worldwide.

This 'globalised media' does not only challenge the 'identity' of youth, but also

shatters the stability of their deep-rooted values and traditions. In the absence of adequate cultural strategies, a state of fluctuation will haunt Arab youth and will take the form of a bewildering duality in Arab societies. The ebb and flow of this duality will be governed by the following: the strength of youth or society structures, the level of their social, psychological and cognitive maturity, and their degree of human and economic advancement. This element requires an examination of the relevant mechanisms.

Arab regimes as well as their governmental bodies and institutions strive to counter the adverse effects of globalisation through diverse programmes and activities that can hardly be evaluated at this point. However, various institutions react differently to this fierce threat: Arab educational institutions did not promptly move to embrace the imminent changes. Instead, they maintained their traditional ways of operating. Steps were taken in the direction of changing students' political orientations and bringing about mere formal changes in the educational process. On the other hand, other social institutions, in response, adopted rote-based activities that coincide with the philosophy of the educational institutions.

As for the civil society organisations (CSOs), they work within the available economic, political, and organisational space. Religious institutions in particular however, prove to be the most capable in addressing the cultural mechanisms of globalisation. Their attitudes oscillate between absolute rejection and conditional acceptance.

Islamic and Christian religious institutions have devoted special attention to the social and cultural repercussions of globalisation. Preachers of different orientations decided to discuss and reach an appropriate religious stand. As an example, in a symposium entitled "Globalisation and Upbringing Priorities' held in King Saud University in Riyadh in July 2004, participants stressed the necessity of devising a project to safeguard Islamic identity while boosting the morale of youth. Participants opposed the so-called "Globalisation of Ethics" and called for an ethical alternative.

some religious bodies tend to introduce a pragmatic discourse which acclimatizes to, rather than rejects, new repercussions.

Adopting a more realistic approach, some religious bodies tend to introduce a pragmatic discourse which acclimatizes to, rather than rejects, new repercussions. Furthermore, they smartly suggest religious approaches to address them. This is best illustrated in the fatwa (legal opinion) of Sheik Abdul Majeed al-Zindani on what he calls 'marriage friend'. This fatwa allows the university students and young employees to get married temporarily until the academic and practical potentials of both parties are fully developed. Al-Zindani maintains that the marriage that is intended in his fatwa enjoys all the Islamic requirements, with a declaration of marriage, an acceptance thereof, a wali (a legal guardian), a dowry (just a token), and the absence of any legal obstructions for the couple. Advocates of this fatwa argue that, as is the case with the young men and women in the West who establish relations outside wedlock, it is more realistic and logical to make lawful the friendship-based relationships among young Arab women and men in line with religion and culture.

Many observers were shocked with this bold fatwa, which they perceived as a direct influence of the globalisation of foreign attitudes and culture, and which has led some men of religion to openly acknowledge the sexual desires of youth. This attitude of acknowledgement is completely new to an otherwise dominant tendency, which encourages suppression of such desires, through more vigorous spiritual and religious adherence, in order to control one's instincts. In fact, most of the fatwas around such matters over the past few decades have tended to advocate patience and fasting, and/or

the need for gender segregation. In other words, the fatwa of Sheik al-Zindani indicates an emerging religious trend, which is realistically tackling some of the contemporary challenges of youth.

Social Implications

Social implications of globalisation revolve primarily around identity, and one's relations with the other, the community, and the homeland. The values governing the individual and the society may or may not be shaken in face of these repercussions. However, it is vital to note that it is not feasible to blame all the changes in Arab societies on globalisation. Change, in whatever form, is part and parcel of the development of societies. Social change represents the crucible within which is poured the outcome of all political, economic, and cultural developments. The freedom of a person, for instance, is determined by her/his political conditioning, and by their exercise of citizenship.

The social repercussions of globalisation cover a broad area. A number of germane issues will thus be discussed as examples of these repercussions.

Poverty

The disintegration of social safety nets, the privatization of public services, and the re-pricing of basic commodities are just some of the outcomes of the economic policies that engendered poverty in the last two decades under the international dominance of the "Washington Consensus.' Developing countries were compelled by the burden of their heavy debts to follow orders from the IMF **(10)** whereby the poor were denied social protection coverage, and nothing became of the social modernization project that was at the core of development thinking, and on the top of the agenda in independent Arab countries.

The social repercussions of Globalisation did not invent poverty, but they augmented it greatly by creating the conditions which exacerbate it. This so-called 'poor society' is, in turn, more susceptible to economic, political, social, and cultural vulnerabilities. Using this understanding, it is evident that all Arab countries are deemed poor in one way or another. The brunt of this poverty is mostly borne by youth, who derive their knowledge and skills from those of society at large. If youth in Arab countries represent 30 - 50 percent of the population, then it is they who suffer the hardships of poverty. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, 2 million survive on less than a US$1 per day while 12.1 million live on less $ 2 per day, and 7.1 per cent suffer from malnourishment.

Poverty in Arab countries disproportionately affects rural zones, especially young farmers. Poverty in urban areas is largely attributed to deprivation and economic deterioration in rural areas, as people are consistently moving from there to urban ones. **(11)**

The 2002 Arab Human Development Report suggests that the deficiency of human capacities and high unemployment cause the current situation in Arab countries to persist. A lack of capacity and untapped human potential detract from the individual and the community's ability to launch an "Arab renaissance".

Education is considered one of the most critical tools for either the development or

impairment of human capacities. It is the mirror which reflects the degree of poverty and the pace of achieving more human development. Additionally, it contributes to the achievement of many goals from technological transformation to poverty elimination. Evidence from Arab countries suggests illiteracy among adults in different age groups as well as consistent drop-out rates. Thus, major segments of the entire population in Arab countries are still deprived of an education, resulting mitigating against education's significant potential to boost social mobility in Arab countries. Enrolment in education is a response to calls for modernization, which were adopted by political regimes. It thus was evident that job opportunities should be the logical end point for the trajectory of education. Jobs are also the social and the political reward since the 'right to work' is considered a natural consequence of undertaking the 'obligation of education'. **(12)**

Education in the age of globalisation has become a tool to either mainstream or marginalise youth. It has become increasingly available for the privileged. The latter have access to the best opportunities in health, culture, and employment, which essentially renders them the future elite in politics, technology, and intellect.

Both the integration and the marginalisation of youth are driven by numerous factors that considerably influence the educational process: educational facilities may be well-equipped or dilapidated, learning activities could be either centralized or decentralized; educational methodologies could either promote rote-learning or critical thinking; the student-teacher relationship may be humane or mechanical. All these factors squarely push youth inside or outside the educational process.

In addition, there is one other factor which controls the processes of inclusion or exclusion of the educated people living in remote rural and urban areas, or in poor urban ones: the distance one must travel to reach a school. Evidently, the location of the school plays a crucial role in the decision made by the people living in those areas to complete or terminate their children's education, especially for the girls. Mothers who compel their girls to leave school explain that the girl is a treasure that should be protected from abuse or seduction and argue that the remoteness of the school jeopardizes the safety of the girl. "It is better to keep her in front of my eyes', reported one mother in the 2001 documentary film "Girls Dreams", by Atiyyat al-Abnoudi.

Dedicated in their early years to work on the farm or to any occupation that assists the family, youth are often forced to stay away from school. In such tight situations, tuition fees are comparatively higher than their work revenue. Against this backdrop, female exclusion is far more pronounced. Primarily, it appears as a historical legacy of large-scale illiteracy manifested in one in every three males and one in every two females. Illiteracy reaches its highest levels in Iraq (61 percent) and its lowest level in Jordan (12 percent). This legacy of excluding females from the education circuit however, still haunts all who seek school enrolment. In primary education, one out of four females remains out of school, as opposed to one out of five males. In Djibouti, enrolment has declined to 30 percent at the primary education levels, and enrolment reaches 35 percent for males and does not exceed 26 percent for females. Gender parity in enrolment rates is only realized in 5 Arab countries: Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and the UAE (among 19 countries covered by the 2004 UNESCO report). **(13)**

A gender-biased approach thus accentuates this pattern of discrimination that is not

only confined to education but also extends to many other areas including job opportunities and wages. Discrimination against females in education is clearly linked to cultural perceptions and stereotypes of Arab women: for example, considering education as more important for males than for females; or viewing female education in a positive light, but not a right (UNICEF, 2004).

Education has long been considered the immediate solution for combating poverty. The 'World Declaration on Education for All' (Jomtien, Thailand 1990) underscores the commitment of the international community to universalize primary education and harness illiteracy before the elapse of the decade. The 'World Programme of Action for Youth' includes education as the first of ten priorities for youth development. **(14)**

The entire picture, nevertheless, notably shows huge educational disparities. Underprivileged groups are deprived of access to education for reasons of poverty, gender, or the concentration of services in urban areas. The '2005 UN World Youth Report' in fact reveals that poverty is the main obstacle to education. Youth are additionally constrained by poverty in that they lack access to and knowledge of new technology, hence exacerbating their marginalisation and exclusion.

In the Arab regional context, poverty is a deep-rooted issue that is basically connected with wealth and power distribution patterns. Arab poverty is re-produced by the impact of some traditions, the effects of colonialism, and feelings of inferiority. The 'Third Millennium Declaration' highlighted how devoting attention to reproductive health can substantially reduce poverty. Poor families are estimated to spend 70 percent of their income on food of little nutritional value. This means that children in these families are deprived of many other important services like education and healthcare. In fact, early marriage for females persists because it can relieve poor families of some of their responsibilities. **(15)**

The MDGs articulate a universal consensus on broadening the scope of reproductive health to encompass physical, social, and psychological dimensions - unless there is an exception. However, healthcare policies still focus more on the cure than on prevention; and on responses to health emergencies. The World Bank (WB) reported in 2004 that many healthcare policies are not originally devised with the philosophy, goals and objectives in mind that guarantee full benefits for the poor. It is thus imperative, as requested by the WB report, to reformulate these policies in order to serve the poor directly and promptly. According to the report, the poor should also be engaged in devising programmes and projects that affect them(World Bank, 2004).

On the other hand, the AHDR 2002 pointed out that the Arab region has the lowest freedom scores compared to the rest of the world. The utilization of women's capabilities through political and economic participation, remains the lowest in the world. In addition, knowledge acquisition and the building of human capacities remain limited and impede progress towards full human development.

The Family

The Arab family has undergone tremendous changes in the age of globalisation. These changes are evident in the roles and relationships of family members. This section probes into these changes and how they affect the relation of the family with their young offspring. The Arab family in all social classes was always characterized
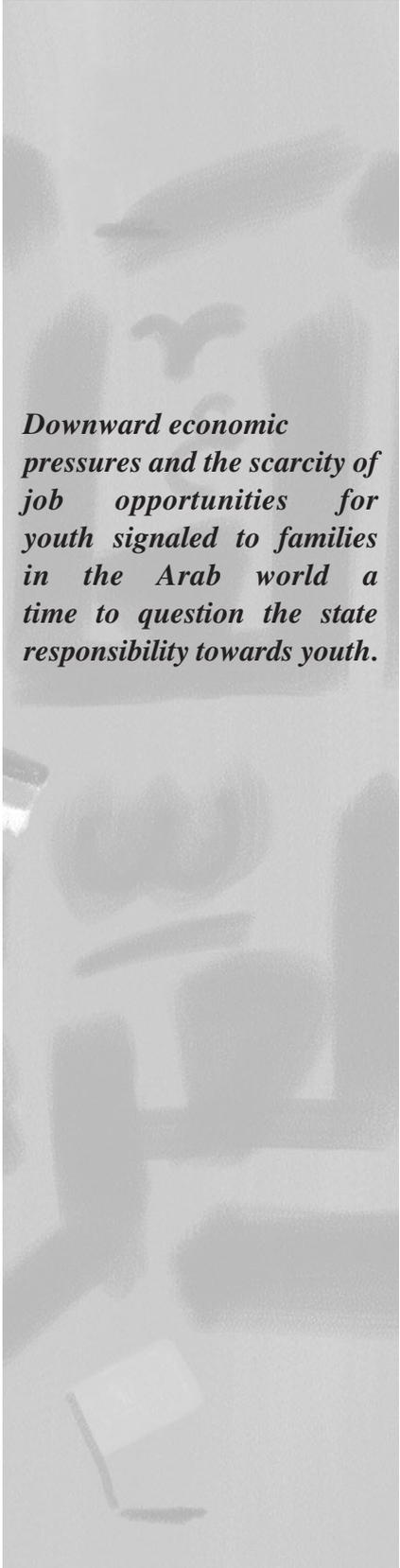
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Downward economic pressures and the scarcity of job opportunities for youth signaled to families in the Arab world a time to question the state responsibility towards youth.

by coherence and integration. Convinced that youth lack sufficient experience and resources, families provided consistent support for their children, especially when starting their lives. Families in rural and poor urban areas enjoy a geographic proximity to their children, allowing them to offer help when needed.

Currently, many factors conspire to weaken this coherence, the most important of which is the economic deterioration of middle-class families. In addition, poor families are forced to give up the responsibility of sponsoring their children. On the other hand, youth are more wary of replicating the same pattern of lifestyle as that of their families. Youth needs have changed drastically. Global media lures them with a rosy picture of the present and the promise of a satiated future. However, these hazy images do not provide the means towards the realization of such prospects.

Change in the parent-youth relationship was also brought about when families, especially those with a good educational base, become increasingly aware of the role of the State and its responsibility towards youth. Downward economic pressures and the scarcity of job opportunities for youth signaled to families in the Arab world a time to question the state responsibility towards youth. Filled with rage, families started to inquire about the government's responsibility towards youth after many years of education. Arab families took heed of the State's role when it started to shrink under privatization policies. It was the absence of the role of governments that stirred Arab families to awake from their deep slumber in which they were sometimes oblivious to the responsibility of state and society, and often either intentionally or unintentionally slow to demand their rights.

The change in the family-youth relationship is evident in the growing tensions that exist between the two generations. Contentious issues include establishing friendships with the opposite sex and choosing fashionable clothes in countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. Young girls tend to follow global fashion trends (it is totally inappropriate to describe them as Western modes), whereas families urge them to wear more modest dress, a concept that is not static and changes according to the place of residence and social class. An urban Lebanese girl may object to allowing her brother to stay out late when she is denied the same freedom. On the other hand, a girl living in a poor or rural area would simply ask to be allowed to go outside in broad daylight without being escorted by her brother.

Among other matters that may change or be subject to the immediate environment is the gender-based division of work. Noticeably, most household tasks are still done by women. However, many changes have occurred in this respect: again, a Lebanese girl from a middle-class, well-educated family may protest against this kind of discrimination. A girl from rural or poor urban zones may be less resentful. Overall, change is more evident in a generation of educated girls as shown by the national survey conducted in Egypt. The report highlighted a tendency towards asking for help with the housework, sharing the responsibility of the household budget (8.71 percent for females, and 3.53 percent for males), and involving the husband in raising the children. **(16)**

Related Manifestations

Migration

According to the 2002 Arab Human Development Report, 51 percent of Arab youth and 45 percent of younger adolescents expressed a desire to emigrate, clearly

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indicating dissatisfaction with current conditions and with future prospects in their home countries.

Rural areas in the Arab world constitute both the largest geographic area and home to the largest portion of the population. Generally, these areas suffer grave deficiencies in their development and educational institutions and are mostly provided with low quality services. The deteriorating conditions inflame rural youth's desire to migrate to a more open and less restrictive society where they can enjoy better services. Immigration is not only a key driver of demographic imbalance, but also of moral imbalance, reflected in the widening desire for immigration amongst youth.

Western countries attract Arab youth. They provide them with better academic and research opportunities and a more stable professional and occupational atmosphere. Skilled Arab youth, who are capable of forging the nation's future, flee from stifling or corrupt working environments, unfulfilling academic and scientific climates, and economic deterioration.

Arab brain drain is intricately driven by a combination of factors that cannot be tackled separately. Analyzing reasons for Arab youth immigration may only be accomplished through an exploration of the Arab political reality, and the avenues for professional progress and scientific research.

Parts of the Arab world are undergoing a phase of political transformation, internal tensions and civil conflict, official intellectual censorship, and consistent attempts to hamper the independence of intellectuals from the regimes. All these factors are repulsive to Arab youth who are driven to become almost refugees rather than a migrating brain drain. Feeling resilient in the face of the major challenges afflicting the Arab world, youth are prodded by these factors to leave their home country.

Slow advances towards higher quality education pushes youth to travel abroad in pursuit of wider academic and research avenues. Regrettably, the Arab economy does not provide a wider space within which research and advancement can flourish. This explains the academic imbalance in Arab universities and the obvious deficiency in embracing creative talents. The severity of the impact of these factors upon Arab youth varies across different Arab countries.

In retrospect, the vivid presence of Arab intellects, researchers, writers, and scholars in the US and Europe essentially explains the motives behind immigration. It also underscores the inability of the Arab world in holding on to, and benefiting from their knowledge and expertise in achieving progress.

Economic Implications

The decline in labour productivity in the Arab world poses a serious challenge for the region. Coupled with inefficient financial capital, this low productivity has stifled growth rates in Arab countries. According to recent World Bank estimates, the gross national product (GNP) of a worker in Arab countries was less than half that of a counterpart in South Korea and Argentina. The relative decline in growth and productivity is due to the fact that Arab countries lag behind other rapidly developing countries that have increased human capital, measured by the average years of education. Compared to the Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan), the Arab GDP per capita was higher than the average of this group in 1960. Paradoxically, the total years of education for the Asian Tigers was higher by an

average of about 3 years compared to Arab countries. This difference has doubled to become 6 years during the period from 1960-1992. It is no wonder that the GDP per capita in Arab countries is now less than half that in South Korea, although it used to exceed it at the beginning of this period. **(17)**

The efficiency of human capital has been eclipsed by some of the economic reforms implemented by developing countries. Such changes include privatization policies, structural adjustment, and decreasing budgets for education and healthcare services. The performance of human capital cannot be measured in the Arab region without discussing those ready-made economic recipes intended to integrate the region into the global economy. Economic inputs entail privatizing healthcare and education. This trend has engendered and expanded social inequality. Other scenarios include: commoditizing academic research to curtail its attempt to fulfil social needs; commoditizing and privatizing retirement funds, intellectual property rights in the fields of industry, culture, and art; commoditizing natural resources. In short, privatization and commoditization conspire to influence all aspects of life. In principle, full competition is the primary target.

Cruel as they appear to be, these inputs become a reality that variably touches upon the lives of all citizens. Worst hit are those who are fundamentally incapable of grappling with the givens of the global economy using their tools of poor quality education or simple occupational, industrial or agricultural experiences. Youth are deemed the most harmed segment, as they have specific needs and have a distinct economic vulnerability. In the Arab world, youth are the least empowered, if compared to the occupational and professional obligations they have to fulfil. Accordingly, youth bear the brunt of unemployment in the region. The Arab Human Development Report 2002 argues that there are pronounced institutional impediments to employment generation in Arab countries. Labour markets are traditional, severely segmented and dysfunctional and the mechanisms of labour force rotation are ineffective. In narrow economic terms, unemployment stemming from economic stagnation categorically causes poverty. **(18)**

The economic effects of globalisation do not affect the lives of all Arab youth in the same way. While they marginalise some youth, others are integrated into the labour markets. Naturally, economic exclusion gave rise to social marginalisation among underprivileged youth in rural or poor urban areas (where 1/3 of the urban population lives); among youth with special needs; and children of workers and farmers who have low levels of education. These youth were forced out of the labour market altogether or left with little choice but to take marginal jobs. Exclusion from modern labour markets also denies youth the chance to participate in vocational training programmes.

Responding to the suggestions put forward by international organisations, most Arab countries in the region address the issue of poverty. One of these suggestions is the establishment of income-generating projects and the promotion of entrepreneurship through the extension of loans, occasionally soft loans, to young people.

Political Implications

What makes youth movements popular in most Arab countries? Observers argue that imitation and peer pressure are a driving force for youth movements in various societies. Others consider youth impatience and recklessness as the impetus for their

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revolution. This latter interpretation underscores youth frustration with rigid traditions commonly accepted and imposed by their elders. A third interpretation ascribes youth movements to their desire for change. This view, however, cannot possibly explain all youth movements. Another extremely important interpretation attributes such activism to the current societal dilemma, which stifles the potential of youth.

The new approach to leadership adopted by youth defies all those obsolete moulds of the 'single leader' and 'patriarchal authority'. The young politician now considers him/herself as one among a group and that s/he could be replaced or substituted. When s/he speaks, s/he does not express her/his own vision, but that of her/his colleagues.

A distinct feature of youth political activity is its flexibility and efficiency. Youth, who are often accused of passivity and apathy, have shown a unique capacity for work and organisation. All youth organisations surprised the world with their deftness in staging demonstrations using new mechanisms that protect the public order and prevent collision with security. Several demonstrations in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Yemen in 2005 had been staged in defiance of legislation that undermined the rights of poor workers and farmers and many segments of the middle-class. Youth also rebelled against political corruption, as well as military and political intervention.

Arab youth are engaged in a search to realize some of the rights they are often denied, such as the rights of citizenship. This has been the case in Libya and the currently occupied Iraq as well as in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco. In their pursuit of carving a niche in civil society, Arab youth strive to have their fundamental rights recognized for effective participation, unrestricted self-expression, association, and influencing of policy. Youth are constantly seeking genuine channels to activate their political role and want to eventually find active legitimate channels. Political parties represent the best avenue for participation as long as they apply democracy, and grant a considerable space for female and male youth participation.

Youth are constantly seeking genuine channels to activate their political role and want to eventually find active legitimate channels. Political parties represent the best avenue for participation as long as they apply democracy, and grant a considerable space for female and male youth participation.

It is necessary to study the international experiences that are not characterized by absolute rejection or total acceptance of globalisation; these experiences are most relevant to Arab societies. The most important step, however, is to focus on youth who are the best investment for the future of Arab societies. They also represent an opportunity to hurdle the current political and economic impasse. Youth, who are the promise for the future, also represent a sizeable portion of the population, which needs policies tailored to its own interests. Youth are capable of helping the region to get out of the tunnel of the developing world and move towards true independence.

Genuine change in the Arab world will occur with the unified voice and solidarity of all active social segments of the population. In each social stratum, there is a portion that is most capable of action. When all potent forces in each social stratum unite, they can form a vertical coalition. A wide-ranging coalition should be an option for all political forces, wherein various social segments and political movements are represented and work together in a bid to defeat political stagnation in the region.**(19)**

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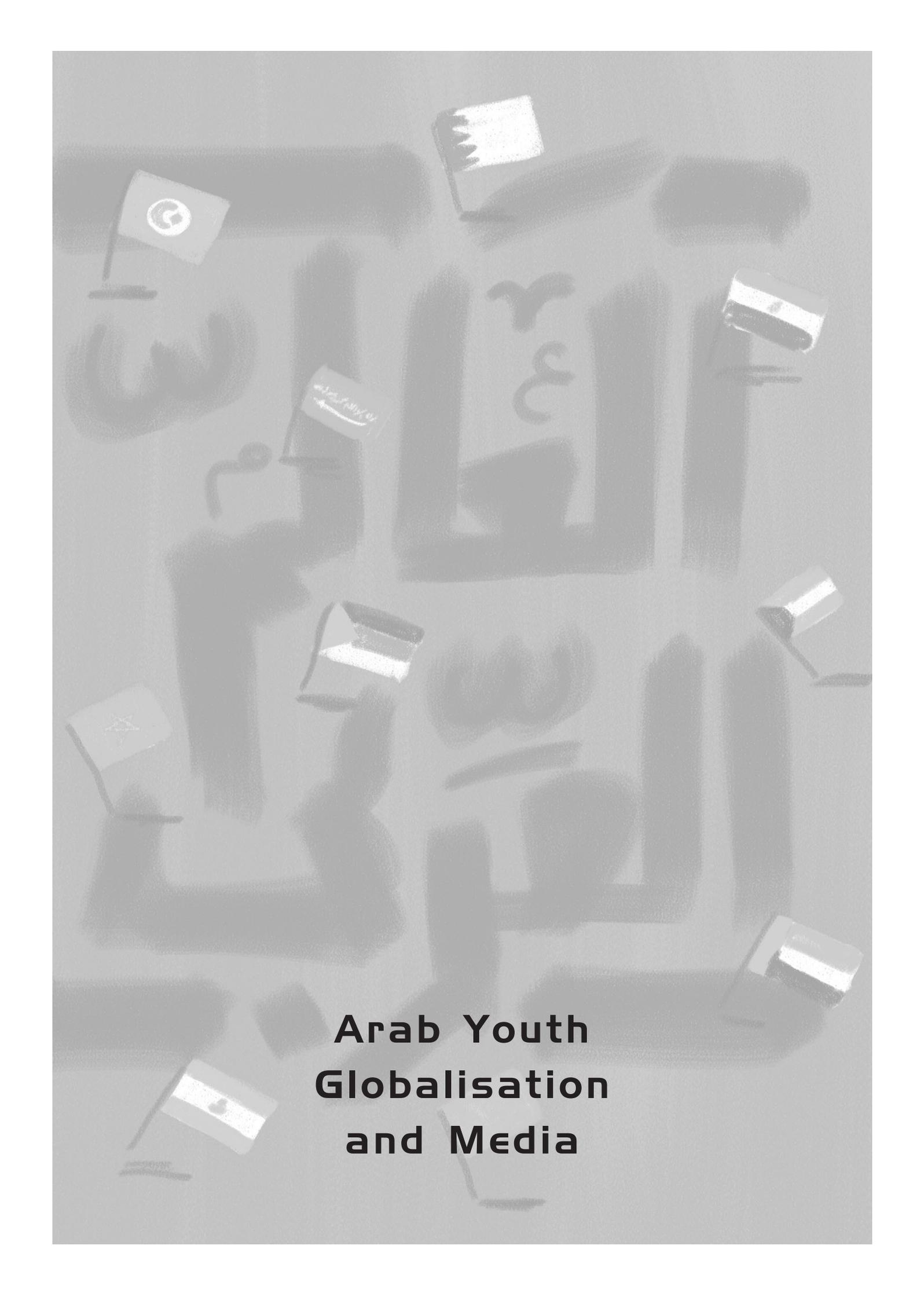
Arab Youth
Globalisation
and Media

Arab Youth, Globalisation, and the Media

Rami Khoury

Introduction

For both Arab youth and globalisation, the mass media is a major force that deserves deeper analysis because it plays two simultaneous and profound roles: it at once is an instrument of change and a reflection of realities. It also significantly influences the values, aspirations and lifestyles of some young Arabs. While some Arabs see the media as an uncontrollable monster that bombards their society with foreign ideas and values, others view it as the best opportunity the Arab world has had in centuries to interact on an equal footing with the rest of the world.

The globalised media is ultimately a mirror of our own societies, the world at large, and the many ways in which Arab youth engage their own societies and the wider world around them. Like all mirrors, it reflects and can distort reality, and shows us things we like and things we do not like about ourselves and our societies.

Some in the Arab world criticize globalisation and the mass media as a poisonous tool that aims to change our ideas and values. Some governments and quarters of society have tried, largely in vain, to restrict communication flows, aiming to block access to undesirable political, sexual, religious or cultural materials. Recent experience suggests that such defensive measures are difficult to enforce, and citizens who wish to access the media will always find a way to do so. The question then becomes: how does the global media impact Arab youth, and how should Arab society approach this issue?

The impact of the globalised mass media on Arab youth is already significant and promises to expand in the years to come. It covers almost all dimensions of life: news, culture, the global economy, politics, entertainment, education, professional life, training, religion, and radical militancy and terrorism, to mention only the most obvious. Yet, because this is a new and rapidly evolving field, little evidence on the media's impact on youth is based on solid social science research. All variables of this equation are changing, specifically the conditions of young Arabs, the wider Arab political, economic and social environment, and the general relationship between the Arab world and the West. Nevertheless, the available research and anecdotal evidence do allow us to identify some pertinent issues and trends to monitor.

Globalisation and the Media

By promoting virtually unlimited communication among geographically dispersed societies, mass media is a primary driver of the current wave of globalisation. The sectors of finance and investment, commercial trade, news, and culture and entertainment were the first to grasp the enormous potential of the unbridled, pervasive, and intrusive global communication system. Commercial impulses and profit opportunities quickly drove the globalisation of communication systems, which ultimately broke free of government controls and responded primarily to the market forces of supply and demand. The free flow of information, entertainment, commercial and political material has vastly accelerated the effect of external
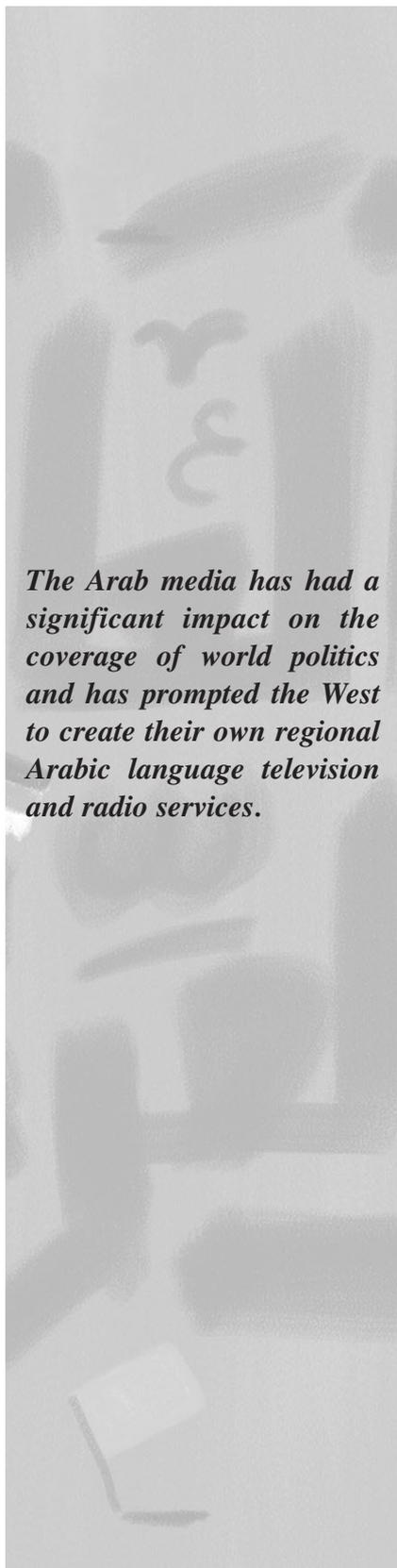
The Arab media has had a significant impact on the coverage of world politics and has prompted the West to create their own regional Arabic language television and radio services.

influences on Arab societies, in most cases hastening transformations that had already been underway at a slower pace. The globalisation of the media has also provided new opportunities for Arabs to interact with and influence the world via the global media, and it seems to have sparked a new dynamism and creativity in Arab popular culture and in news broadcasting.

The impact of globalised mass media on Arab youth, consequently, may be seen as a combination of threat and opportunity. A vast majority of Arabs see Western media, as it relates to and portrays politics, lifestyles, and gender roles, as a grave danger to Arab youth. Yet the fact that many Arabs embrace much of the global media fare reflects receptiveness and a desire for change that is also part of the Arab reality. Thus, the Arab world reacts to the global media with a bit of a split personality. The government, political forces, social and religious movements try to resist and restrict the global media's impact; whereas other entities, such as commercial firms and educational institutions, eagerly embrace the free flow of ideas and information that global media represent.

The past decade witnessed a significant development of media-driven globalisation that gave birth to regional or pan-Arab media organisations, which in many ways have mirrored the role of this phenomenon. Arab satellite channels and FM radio stations, in particular, have adopted many of the same formats and techniques used in the Western-dominated mass media channels. Though advances were made, Arab media still lags behind Western media in content and depth, especially in the areas of original documentaries, investigative journalism, and other such programmes. However, the Arab media, especially the pioneering al-Jazeera satellite channel, The Arab media has had a significant impact on the coverage of world politics and has prompted the West to create their own regional Arabic language television and radio services. This reveals one fascinating aspect of Arabs' role in the global media. Media may be the only area where Arabs have the opportunity to compete with the dominant Western countries and corporations on an even playing field. This competition highlights the opportunity that globalised mass media presents Arab youth and the Arab world as a whole.

Arab youth, like Arab societies at large, reflect a variety of conditions and perspectives that make generalizations impossible. The experience of youth in the Arab world today is shaped by a number of influential events and factors: the impact of the end of the Cold War, economic and demographic pressures, internal political demands for change, a new generation of more reform-minded leaders, external pressures for change that have accelerated briskly since September 11 2001, and the continuing economic and cultural impact of the forces of globalisation. Arab youth, who struggle to cope with changes in their societies, also feel the pressure of two dynamic concerns: first, the normal transition from adolescence to university or working life; second, the harsh economic pressures and insecurities caused by unemployment. People suffer the highest rate of unemployment in the Arab world (average of 25 percent in 2003, according to the International Labour Organisation) and the prevalence of underemployment is also very high among the youth.

Trends in the Impact of Media on Arab Youth

A confluence of elements, many of which youth are particularly vulnerable to, contribute to the shape of Arab societies. Though the interaction of Arab youth with the global media is a multi-faceted, dynamic process, the dimensions and consequences of this process are debated, even when there is relative clarity on some of the general trends.

Often contradictory forces or pressures determine the nature of the interaction between Arab youth and the global media. On one hand, the vast majority of young Arab men and women enjoy a strong sense of personal and communal identity. Their set of values and support networks are anchored in their family, religion, and their country. On the other hand, a great number of youth are overwhelmed with apprehensions and worries, and perhaps discontent and resentment as well. They have vented their frustration both within their societies and towards the outside world. However, youth routinely complain that their voices are not heard and that their opinions are not taken seriously. Many youth are not adequately educated and versed in real life skills. They are also plagued by deficiencies in employment generation and training programmes. According to opinion polls, and the viewpoints of officials, teachers and civil society activists, these issues reflect the most recurrent complaints among the Arab youth.

Pouring their raging political discontent on the West, young Arabs also regard the messages of Western mass media as politically motivated and hostile to Arabs or Muslims. At the same time, Arab youth enjoy many aspects of global media, especially the material offered by satellite television and the Internet which are not always available within their own societies. Youth strongly gravitate to television news, political and cultural debates, and entertainment programmes and use the mass media to explore viewpoints and lifestyles not available locally, and gain insight into new personal and professional horizons.

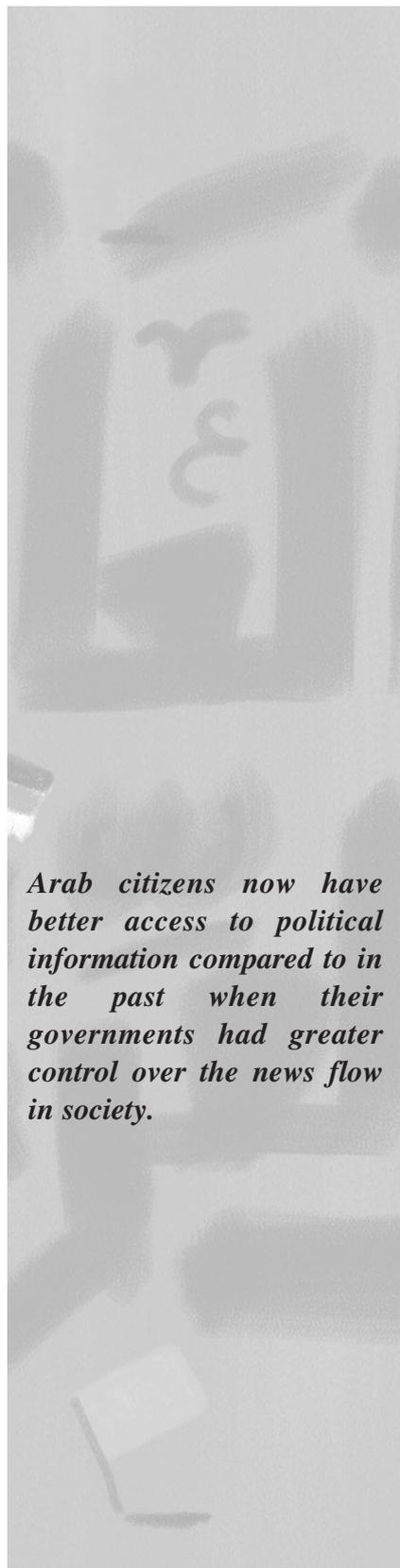### The Media Habits of Arab Youth

Media content that attracts one group of Arab youth may frighten another thereby provoking resistance to global media. This tension is part of the controversy that reflects the wider diversity of opinion across the region. In this respect, Arab youth represent a powerful microcosm and mirror of Arab society as a whole. Youth typically articulate their worries, anger, and apprehensions more vehemently than their parents. The media habits of Arab youth serve as a valuable barometer of the prevailing elements of their society, and also represent something of an early warning sign of both positive and negative trends in society. Arab youth are usually the first to absorb the impulses or habits imported from the West, and are also the first segment of society to show signs of social, political or economic problems that should be addressed, such as radicalism, drug abuse, and domestic violence.

Global mass media and communications captivate many Arab youth. The media is liberating and empowering to young Arabs who increasingly seek, especially through electronic communications and technology, material they are not able to enjoy inside their conservative societies. Choices available to Arab youth in their day-to-day lives are generally restricted by patriarchal, political, religious, or social fetters. A young Arab man or woman using the internet, a cell phone, and FM radio or satellite television in the privacy of their own room or local internet cafe can engage in a number of activities or explore ideas that are usually prohibited.

These rare and forbidden pleasures include the freedom to express oneself regarding controversial issues, choosing one's own friends and companions, discussing with full transparency personal or sensitive issues with elders or peers, and voting in song contests and having one's opinion count. Youth can use the mass media to challenge majority views and explore minority perspectives, experiment with novel ideas, hold others accountable, and propose original ideas on issues of public concern. They can be creative and daring culturally and artistically; can engage people from other cultures, countries or religions in profound discussions and active dialogue; access political or economic information that
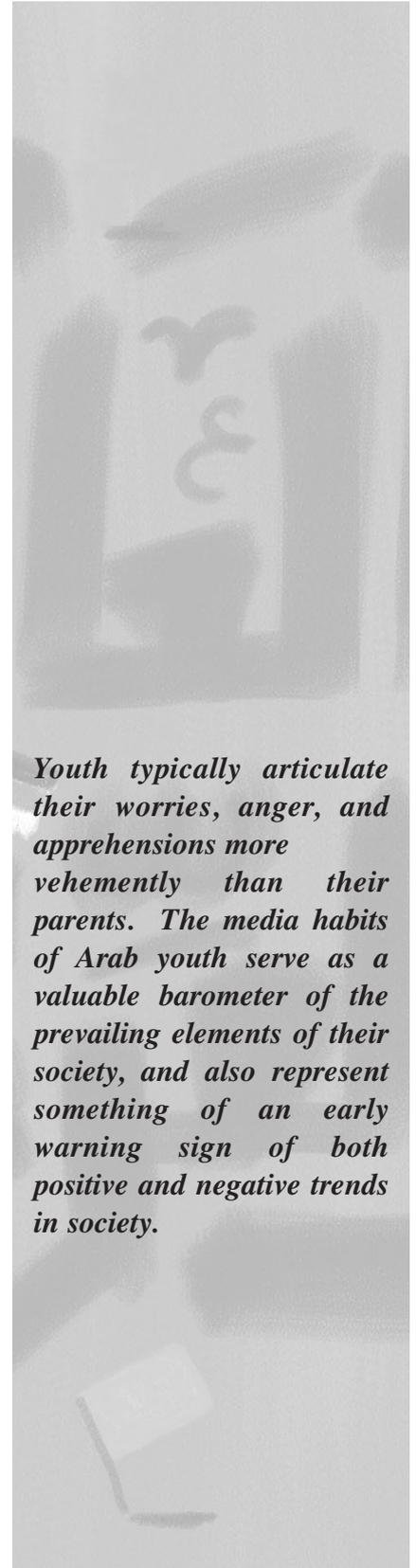
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would be considered sensitive or prohibited in their own country; or simply wander into a new or far off universe of ideas and values.

The global media offers young Arabs a wide range of personal life options that can be at once liberating, empowering, entertaining, and fulfilling. In some extreme cases, politically motivated youth may use for further political goals and as a means to disseminate their messages, express solidarity with their peers, mobilize their supporters, or even debate with their opponents. Mass media and communications offer youth the opportunity to create special political or social relationships that are at times virtual and at others real. The importance of this development is underscored by how easily youth can slip into this new world with a simple click.

Captivating the Youth Audience

The most recent trend in mass media and communications in the Arab world is its infusion with a strategic military agenda. In this respect, Arab and Western media play the role of weapons and war machinery in political conflicts and actual wars. The most dangerous of these include Osama Bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who use the Arab satellite television and the internet to convey recorded messages to the Western and Arab worlds and engage them politically. In its endeavor to capture the attention of viewers, listeners and readers worldwide, the US administration has launched a TV channel (AL HURRA), FM radio station (Radio SAWA), and magazines in Arabic. Interestingly enough, these initiatives (targeted at Arabs) are justified on the basis of the logic that existing pan-Arab satellite media distort American goals, actions, and objectives in the Arab world and further inflame anti-US sentiment in the region. Thus the impact of Arab media goes beyond the regional and the national realms.

Fierce competition in attracting a captive audience among media outlets is present in all spheres of programming and has worked to enhance the quality of the media itself, especially in satellite television. Over the past few years, great strides were made in the fields of current news coverage and political debate programmes. Given the rich diversity of programmes across regional and international media. Arab citizens now have better access to political information compared to in the past when their governments had greater control over the news flow in society, this new freedom indicates a more positive influence of the media in the promotion of open discussions of sensitive political issues in the Arab world.

However, this situation highlights one of the chronic tensions, or perhaps ironies, of the region: the complex relationship between Arab youth and the global media. While Arab youth can easily and quickly access divergent opinions on current events, some of those youth are oblivious to the world of politics. Though there is an increase in accessibility of information in society, many among this youth population appear to be politically apathetic, perhaps because their improved access to information is not always matched with opportunities for participation in politics or for influencing policy formulation. This fact emphasizes the vital role of the media in the general political framework of Arab society in activating the role of the average citizen. However, an improved connection with the global media, in the short term, may exacerbate a citizen's despair due to the centralized and static political systems that allow few entry points for participation. In the long run, it is likely that well-informed citizens will move to affect change in their societies. This process has already produced tangible results in some Arab countries.

With the new accessibility to many subject areas covered by global media and communication, an increasingly open market for ideas is emerging. This market will

Arab citizens now have better access to political information compared to in the past when their governments had greater control over the news flow in society.

generate the supply of information in the case of a tangible demand. Both Arab and global media available throughout the region carry a wide array of programmes from the news of Osama Bin Laden, Amr Diab, Tony Blair and Donald Rumsfeld, to serial dramas from Egypt and Brazil, short pornography films, religious programmes, Michael Jackson videos, dance and music shows produced in Beirut and Los Angeles, to shopping programmes and news and debates from Doha, London, and Washington.

Global communication systems provide a gateway for youth to delve into the enticing realms of creativity, innovation, learning, professionalism, and democratic governance. However, these systems are also able to inspire ideologies of extremism and violence in some users. In many cases, the media has flagrantly challenged local Arab sensibilities, whether in the form of bold political views, or socially jarring scenes of scantily clad female dancers or presenters. Much of the material deemed objectionable by one group or another in the Arab world is just as likely to originate within the Arab world as it is to from a foreign city.

An Evolving Media Landscape

This new feature on the media landscape sheds light on one of the most significant results of Arab exposure to and interaction with the global media: the quality and pace of news and entertainment programmes in the Arab world were amplified as a natural result of globalisation. At the outset, the Arab world, like all other developing areas worldwide, was a passive recipient of all Western ideas in the global media. When market experts in the mid-nineties recognized the robust population of hundreds of millions of Arab consumers, global institutions began to prepare Arabic material to meet the demands of this huge and diversified market. At this point, the media was swept with a torrent of Arabic music and movie contests, dance shows, television series, sports, political debates and other programmes. This upsurge was probably a spontaneous reaction to the apprehension towards a flood of Western cultural values.

The resulting landscape is a product of a diversified and competitive communication sector. Consumers increasingly receive undesired messages from the Internet or through their cell phones. Global media and communication systems, moreover, reflect hybrid and pluralistic societies emanating from diverse ethnic and social perspectives. The primary concern that dominated the debate in the 1990s, which centered on the ability of Western media to transform Arab societies into a homogeneous replica of the U.S. consumer, now appears simplistic. In practice, Arab youth interact with and approach media in a variety of ways, mainly reflecting their specific contexts, concerns, and aspirations.

The Relationship between Arab Youth and the Media

First, youth both benefit and are bewildered by global media. Truly, youth use the media to learn new ideas and facts. However, the media can still promote feelings of confusion about their identities. Much of what they experience in the media-freedom of choice, meritocracy-based professional development, democratic governance, personal freedom of choice, wealthy consumer societies - is usually only virtually available to them. Arab youth who use the mass media to explore the restricted or forbidden worlds where all is glossy and beautiful can grow to resent the less satisfying realities of their own real worlds. Second, through consumption of global media, youth find themselves pushed to the forefront while simultaneously relegated to the margins. Their self-confidence is boosted when they expand their practical knowledge and communicate with their peers around the world. But at the same time, they may feel marginalised within their own societies, or

Definitely, frustration among youth is exacerbated when they share their thoughts and ideas with people worldwide yet are incapable of altering the economic, social, and political realities in their societies.

Arab youth reliance on globalized communication technologies will inevitably influence the region's political systems. Cell phone messaging and voice networks have been used as critical mobilization tools for public rallies against the government in many Arab countries, and satellite television coverage of political events in one country influences mass political movements in others.

globally in relation to the West, when they realize that fresh and progressive ideas must remain within the boundaries of the virtual and digital world. Definitely, frustration among youth is exacerbated when they share their thoughts and ideas with people worldwide yet are incapable of altering the economic, social, and political realities in their societies.

Third, through exploring the labyrinth of global communications youth may experience complacency and alienation. In this virtual world, they connect with other youth who share their political, religious, cultural, leisure and vocational interests. With the lapse of time, youth are caught in the space between two realms - the local and national vis-á-vis the Western and the global. Some Arab youth who interact heavily with Western cultural norms in the areas of music, sports, clothing, food, politics, and cinema transcend the alienation stage and comfortably slip into a new world in which they are the vanguard of a novel global citizenry, defined by a hybrid of entertainment and cultural values disseminated by commercial communications media.

Fourth, global media give Arab youth a window of opportunity for self-expression, especially girls and young women whose social conditions and constraints are even more severe than those of boys and young men. Chat rooms, websites, e-mails, opinion polls and other outlets represent an invaluable forum for youth opinions and ideas. These media, unquestionably, are a rich repository and echo chamber of the many voices of young Arabs. Most of those youth do not have other readily available means to express their concerns, suggestions, desires and criticism. What youth say in these forums is usually critical of their society and immediate environment. Thus, media captivates Arab youth as it addresses their most daunting problems which arise when their voices are not heard or simply taken lightly. Viewed in light of the number of youth who have revealed their desire to emigrate, the significance of this outlet is clear. This fervent desire, according to the statistics cited in the Arab Human Development Report, is grounded in gnawing concerns of youth about their future employment, education prospects. The media provide youth with space to vent their worries and concerns. An important priority for researchers in this field is to decipher interactions between Arab youth and the global media in order to better understand its influences and how young people use the media to honestly express their political, social, and religious sentiments.

Fifth, some researchers already see signs that email and internet-based activities are replacing young people's traditional family-based socialization networks. Global media will soon affect the Arab world in such a way that the collective and social identities - a distinctive feature of Arab society for millennia- would fade. More and more Arab youth may find themselves living simultaneously in two parallel but contradictory worlds - their private world of digital-based personal freedom, and the public world of their local community, school, workplace and home, where personal choices and behaviour are largely regulated by their society.

Sixth, A*rab youth reliance on globalized communication technologies will inevitably influence the region's political systems. Cell phone messaging and voice networks have been used as critical mobilization tools for public rallies against the government in many Arab countries, and satellite television coverage of political events in one country influences mass political movements in others.* Inspired by events in non-Arab countries like Georgia and Ukraine, some Arab activists execute collective political actions with the help of these technologies. For example, television coverage of events in one Arab country also inspires activism by Arabs in other countries, according to the personal testimony of activists in The Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Bahrain.

Conclusion

Communications and media thoroughly influence Arab youth who generally have a more advanced command of technology than their society at large. Some Arab youth may use the Internet, cell phone, and satellite television to promote their education and their careers, engage in conflict resolution efforts, engage in meaningful dialogue and solidarity groups, and establish bonds of friendship with their peers of different cultures and religions. On the other hand, other Arab youth could use this technology for violent means such as explode bombs in their countries and abroad, exporting drugs, promoting illegal immigration, or playing films capturing scenes of the beheadings of foreign captives.

The consumption of the global media by Arab youth is controlled by two powerful forces: the unregulated, free market commercial nature of the global and regional media and the contradictory forces that define the mindset of young Arabs, many of whom are confused and concerned about their positions in society and their future. It is strongly recommended that the youth-media relationship be addressed in connection with the Millennium Development Goals and with a vision of youth as Arab citizens with rights, responsibilities, potential and creativity; it is also imperative to alter the traditional view of youth as young people who should have no interests or voice of their own. In this context, the media is the best tool to transform skeptical Arab youth from a state of anxiety and passivity to one of creativity and engagement conducive to new ideas and economic dynamism.

Youth and adults who work with them in the Arab world tend to agree that the media should be used to interact with youth in two broad spheres: 1) The media should provide youth with much more information and analysis that is relevant to their real life needs (on education, jobs, citizenship, personal health, etc.) as young, responsible citizens. The media can fill in those important gaps in the existing health, education and employment systems, in areas such as education and career counselling, personal health and hygiene, political awareness and participation, citizenship rights and civic duties, the opportunities and constraints of globalisation, and other such key fields. 2) The media should be developed into an interactive two-way communication channel that allows youth to express themselves and to be heard and taken seriously as they engage in public political debate and activities, including elections, parliament, local government, holding public and private sector officials accountable, and media discussions. If youth were able to vote on issues more politically significant than pan-Arab song contests, the nature of public governance in the Arab world would likely be very different, and probably more stable and peaceful.

These are not new endeavors, but activities that youth already engage in as they navigate the immense and ever expanding world of the globalised mass media. The combined curiosity, confusion, fears, dynamism and aspirations of youth make for a potentially powerful mix. As we can see already from the way that Arab youth use the global media, this force can be channeled towards positive or negative purposes. Maximizing the positive and minimizing the negative will require changing the way we view both youth and the media. We should look at Arab youth and media as essential cornerstones and indigenous productive elements of a healthy society, ones that are full of energy and ideas, rather than seeing the global media as a threat and a problem and seeing our youth as silent, voiceless recipients.

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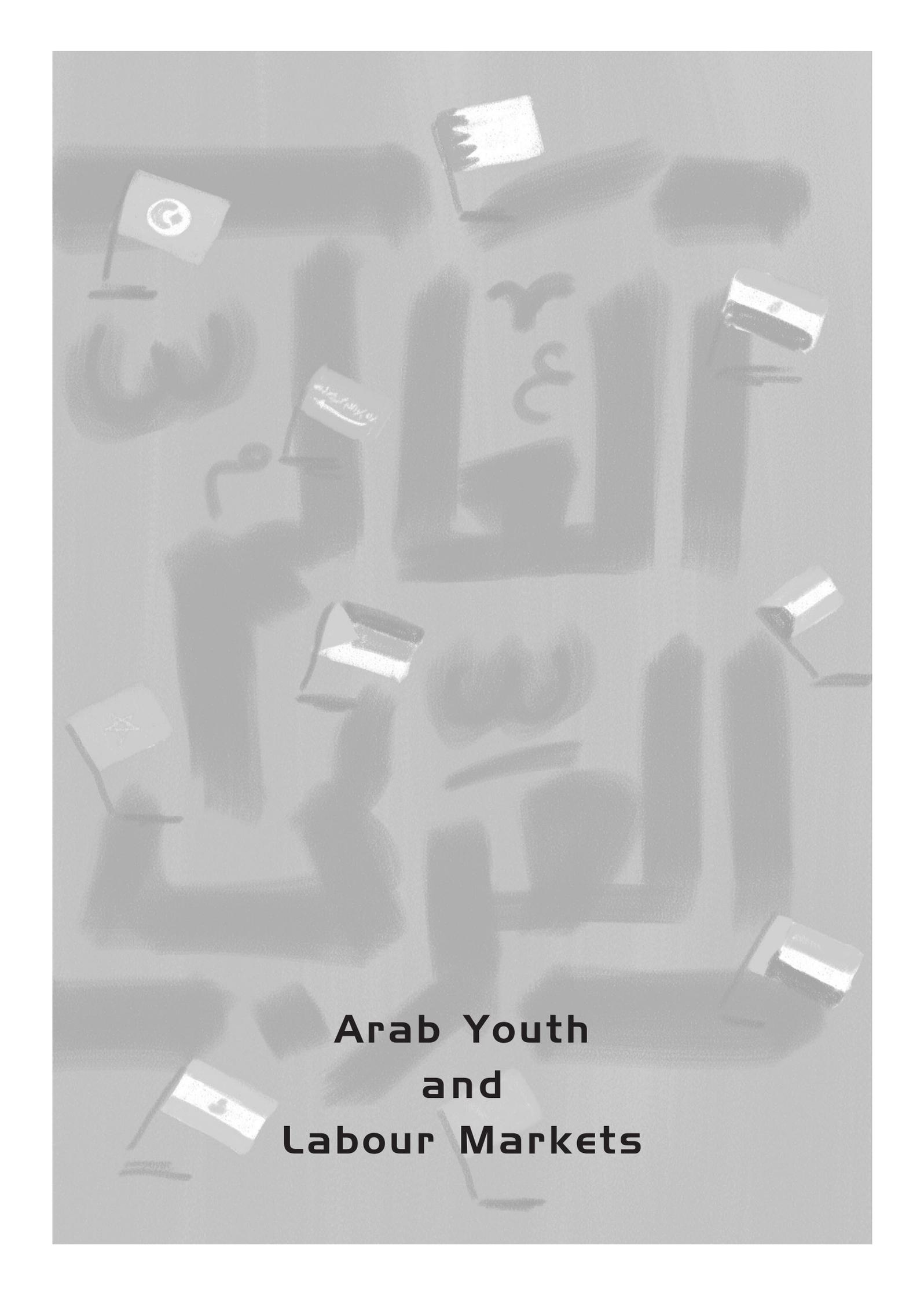
Arab Youth
and
Labour Markets

Youth Employment and Labour Markets in the Arab States

Tarek Haq
(Prepared for Publication by Joop Theunissen)

Introduction

Youth unemployment reflects a number of social, economic, and political factors - both at the level of the individual and the society. In practice, the pressure of unemployment is demonstrably harrowing for youth. Its bitterness intensifies with the approach of marriage and the relative independence from the family. Coupled with poverty and limited support provided by family and social solidarity networks, the consequences of unemployment are unquestionably felt most acutely by youth.

This paper presents the general trends of Arab labour markets; the positions of youth in the labour market; the Arab regional economic context; and the determinants of youth employment policies in the Arab world.

Youth worldwide generally encounter specific challenges in their transition from relative the protection of childhood to the independence of youth. The most distinctive feature of this stage of life is establishing stable relationships of marriage and consequent pregnancy as indicated later in this report. Transition, on the other hand, entails an entrance into the labour market. In their transition from education to employment, youth face specific challenges that are generally overlooked by policy makers. The lack of employment experience of youth is a stumbling block for first-time job hunters in their search for a full-time paid job. Arguably, it is easier in the labour market to shift from one job to another than to seek a job for the first time. This is called the "inside-outside" effect.

There is presumably a mismatch between the wage and job expectations of graduates and the realities of the labour market. In most cases, youth may even give up their search for a first job. The quality and relevance of youth education to skills demanded by prospective employers is a bone of contention. The limited correlation between the quality of education and the skills demanded by the labour market cannot necessarily be reduced to the nature of learning promoted by secondary education. Many youth cannot claim to have been formally trained in basic business skills required for small enterprises and entrepreneurship development. Being young workers in the labour market, youth regrettably lack organisation and voice.

Youth in the Arab Labour Market - General Trends

The past fifty years witnessed a decline worldwide in the labour force activity rates of youth, also known as the working sector of the population. The activity rate of youth between 15 and 24 years declined more than 10 percent, i.e. from 70 percent in 1950 to 59 percent in 2000. Such a drop is ascribed to the growing enrolment of youth in secondary and tertiary education.

The increase in youth enrolment stimulated an opposing trend of adult activity over the past fifty years. Activity rates of adults increased from 72 percent in 1950 to 79 percent in 2000. The tremendous boom in women's participation over the last decades is normally attributed to this trend.

High rates of youth enrolment resulted in better-educated and more productive generations. The activity rates of young men are noticeably much higher than those of young women, though these rates have gradually converged. In 1950 the gender gap was 29.2 percent. Fifty years later, it was halved to hit 15 percent in 2000.

High rates of youth enrolment resulted in better-educated and more productive generations. The activity rates of young men are noticeably much higher than those of young women, though these rates have gradually converged. In 1950 the gender gap was 29.2 percent. Fifty years later, it was halved to hit 15 percent in 2000. Activity rates of young people normally differ by region: the lowest is in Europe, followed by Latin America and North America, while the highest recorded are in Asia, Africa and Oceania. The Arab world occupies a middle position among them. Unemployment rates of youth are consistently higher than adult unemployment rates (in most countries between 2 and 4 times higher). The limited data on Arab youth unemployment indicates that these rates are much higher than the average. This suggests that the hurdles hampering the way of first-time job hunters are more serious in the Arab world. In its 2003 report, the ILO estimated unemployment in the MENA region at an average annual rate of 12.2 percent over the preceding ten years. The increase in workforce is expected to continue at an annual rate of 2.6 percent from 2005 till 2015. The decline in productivity and in the real value of wages aggravates unemployment in the Arab world. Similar to the conclusions of the ILO report for 2004, the report on economic trends in the Arab world for 2002, states that the link between low productivity and the continuous increase in the size of the total labour force, suggests a misuse or a complete negligence of this human capital.

The agriculture sector absorbs a large segment of the workforce in rural areas, according to the 2004 ILO report. However, half the populations in countries like Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco works in the informal economic sector. The public sector employs much of the rest of the population.

According to some analysis, workers in the informal economy are at risk of remaining - or becoming - poor as a result of a lack of social safety networks and low wages (below the poverty line), which would place this category of workers in jeopardy.

In most countries of the world, young women have higher unemployment rates than young men. Evidence suggests crucial differences between the experiences of Arab women seeking to enter the labour market and their counterparts around the world.

Regional Economic Conditions

The state of the Arab economy, including trade, investments, and employment policies has a great bearing on youth employability in the region. Arab economies have undergone generally sluggish economic growth. The labour force growth is usually higher than both GDP growth and the number of jobs created. The ensuing pressures on the labour market cause acute unemployment among youth, especially young women. Creeping poverty across the region has gone beyond the countries affected by armed conflicts. Moreover, the nationalization of workforces in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) has serious implications for young migrant workers in the region.

The Arab economy is currently plagued with high unemployment and the underutilisation of its labour force. Formal statistics reveal around 12.5 million unemployed, coupled with the highest (and increasing) unemployment rates in the world, especially for youth. The problem is made worse with 2.5 million new youth entrants to the labour market annually, expected to rise to 3 million by 2010. The economy is thus subject to enormous pressures in order to create jobs for those new entrants, and indeed just to maintain current unemployment levels.

As noted earlier, a growing gender gap in unemployment is noticeably evident. The average female unemployment rate in 2003 was 16.5 percent, 5.9 percent points higher than the male rate of 10.6 percent, according to ILO statistics.

According to the ILO report for 2004, unemployment for Arab youth is twice the rate of the general population. Young women have higher unemployment rates (31.7 percent) than young men (22.7 percent). On the other hand, the World Bank estimates that Arab female unemployment rates are 50 percent higher than male unemployment rates. Unemployment for young women in the MENA region ranges from 13 percent in Bahrain to almost 39 percent in Algeria. Unemployed women are mainly new labour force entrants with a primary and secondary education, or laid-off workers following restructuring and privatisation as is primarily the case in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Towards Youth Employment Policies in the Arab World

The ILO report on the economic trends in the MENA region for the year 2002, suggests that the unemployment rate in Egypt amounted to 10.8 percent in 1995. This rate, however, only represents the age group above 25 years. Unemployment rates among males and females between of 15-20 years were 25.5 percent; and in the age group of 20 to 25 years it was 39.4 percent. The number of unemployed males and females in the latter group was 1.9 million. This number accounts for 95.5 percent of the new entrants in the labour market.

Estimates for the year 2000 indicate high unemployment among youth in Egypt due to a slowdown in economic growth, shrinkage in the demand of the Egyptian labour force, and the entry of 733,000 fresh graduates into the workforce. The informal economy was the most responsive to the demands for labour, as it provided 34.7 percent of the growth in employment.

According to the same report, unemployment rates among the illiterate as well as those with a primary and secondary education in Syria increased to 82.4 percent. The percentage of those working in the informal economy is 34 percent.

The labour force in The Occupied Palestinian Territories increased from 283,000 workers in 1995 to 770,000 workers in 2000. The working population increased by 4.5 percent. Participants in the labour market grew from 39 percent in 1995 to 49 percent in the second quarter of the year 2000. Youth between the ages of 15 and 34 account for 60 percent of the Palestinian labour force.

In Tunisia, unemployment soared to 15 percent during the last decade. The percentage of urban unemployment made up of educated youth is steadily increasing. The report remarkably notes an increase in the female work force to 3.4 percent, compared to less than a 2 percent increase in the male work force. The percentage of new entrants who completed their secondary and higher education increased from 46 percent in 1994 to 58.5 percent in 1997.

The report discusses what makes the Tunisian labour market distinct: there is an established minimum wage; social protection and health insurance are provided to workers in the formal economy where employment and dismissal laws are in place. On the other hand, the informal economy is flexible enough to absorb a more significant portion of the workforce.

As for the GCC countries, they have witnessed a major expansion in employment in the public sector. In their endeavour to minimize the foreign labour force, GCC countries have implemented a series of policies, whereby, for instance, some jobs are reserved for nationals. Taxes are also levied on the foreign labour in the private sector

According to the ILO report for 2004, unemployment for Arab youth is twice the rate of the general population. Young women have higher unemployment rates (31.7 percent) than young men (22.7 percent).

in order to avail nationals of more opportunities in this sector.

With such circumstances, there is an urgent need to implement a comprehensive employment policy that focuses on youth. Such policies must be based on reliable economic and labour market analysis that identify the needs, potential and challenges for young people. Measures taken to address supply and demand in the labour market should be appropriately implemented and monitored. Policies and programmes need to be better tailored towards enhancing employment capabilities, promoting employment opportunities, and improving social security for young people. Employment policies and programmes should be implemented through partnerships among governments, a broad spectrum of CSOs, and with the support of international organisations.

Labour market policies should contain programmes targeted towards the youth population and aimed at creating well-functioning employment services for job hunters, enhancing the skills of the workforce, bridging the skills gap to match labour supply with demand, linking training programmes with employment and offering entrepreneurship training in basic business skills. Employment subsidies for disadvantaged youth (such as school drop outs, vulnerable youth, youth with disabilities, etc.) should be taken into consideration.

It is also imperative for policy makers to acknowledge the reality of migration in the Arab world and to define clear and realistic strategies and policies to address it. This goal requires initiating and developing a consultative process between sending and receiving countries based on mutual respect and benefit. A more active role should be assigned to labour organisations so they can defend migrant workers' rights. Awareness of and promotion of migrant workers' rights should be generated through the media.

Employment policies could also encourage internal immigration inside the region and improve labour market information systems. Cooperation between employment agencies and training providers is conducive to employment generation and establishing a workforce with the appropriate skill set. Providing incentives like subsidies to employers or holding annual ceremonies to honor those with innovative programmes would enhance youth employment. In addition, promoting self-employment and the acquisition of vocational skills fosters the spirit of business ventures and creates a favorable environment for entrepreneurship.

In the final analysis, the success of youth employment policies is dependent on a diversified and ever-growing economy. It should also stem from a firm commitment to secure high wages, and to create favorable working conditions for youth, especially those who do not have a high level of skills. The quality of education and training in the Arab world should continue to enhance women's economic participation. Youth-targeted employment policies should be complemented by reproductive health programmes and services, as they have proven to have a positive effect on the position of youth in labour markets in the region. And last but by no means least, the value of effective partnerships in developing employment policies should not be underestimated.
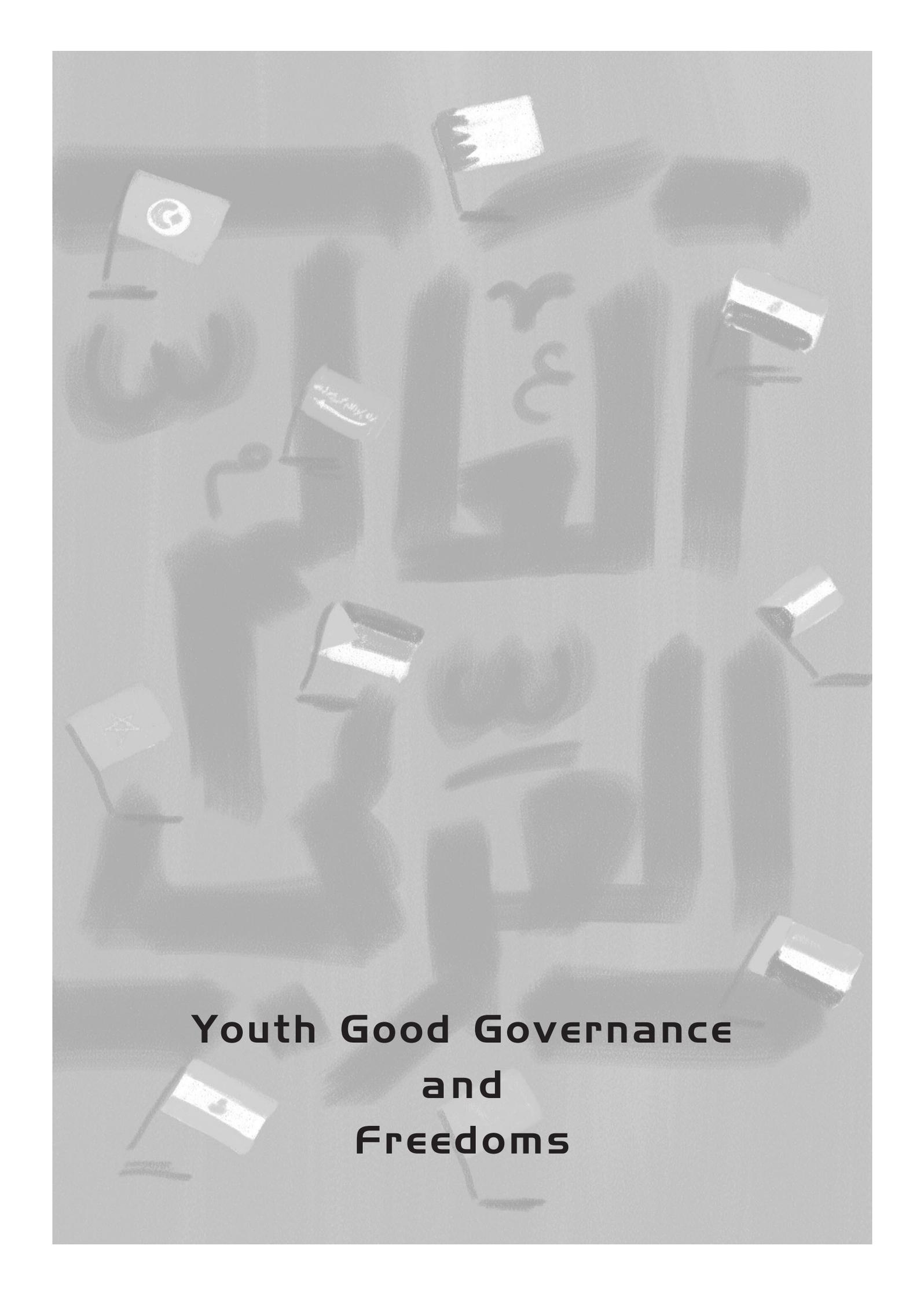
Youth Good Governance
and
Freedoms

Youth, Good Governance and Freedoms

Ali Al-Sawi

Introduction

What do we know about Arab youth? Where are youth located on the political map? What is their impact on political reform policies in Arab states? To what extent are youth considered a part of the slow transformation towards democracy? How do they become part of the solution?

A flood of questions bewilders researchers in their pursuit of workable propositions on youth engagement in the democratization process and in laying the foundations for good governance. The concepts are shrouded in mystery and are puzzling for researchers and young people alike.

One should avoid jumping to conclusions regarding youth participation and their vision of political freedoms and governance. Some key questions that can only be answered with specific data are:

- What is the political definition of youth in Arab states? What are the ages of the voter and the candidate? What are the ages of those in political and executive positions?
- What is the percentage of youth participation in elections (parliamentary, local, and presidential)?
- What is the size of youth representation in parties, syndicates, NGOs, and social clubs? What is the accurate ratio of total unemployment to youth unemployment? What is the percentage of youth who wish to immigrate?
- What are the similarities and differences among youth, male and female?

There is a barrage of vital questions, which go beyond statistics, and require analysis. Concrete answers are quite rare in the realm of Arab research on these issues. Case studies and rough estimates are insufficient in this context. They are also inadequate for the researcher's exploration of the relationships between youth, good governance and freedoms, or for the policy maker who is supposed to devise youth policies based on an accurate assessment of youth conditions. Did Arab governments ever build youth-specific databases? Did they review data collection methods that facilitate access to crucial information? Who, for instance, knows the percentage of youth participation in elections, or even their membership in political parties without youth databases?

In this context, this paper proposes a framework for analyzing the role of Arab youth in establishing good governance institutions and promoting freedoms in their capacity as participants and beneficiaries. In addition, some recommendations are made to improve youth conditions through participation in the process of reform.

The conceptual framework of this paper is anchored in the common reference to the low levels of political empowerment for youth in Arab societies. Five elements illustrating the crisis of youth participation in political life are captured by this paper, with comparisons across Arab countries. These five elements are: confusion, seclusion, division, conflict, and uncontrollability. The paper is thus divided into three main sections presenting the following issues: Good governance as an approach towards youth empowerment; the perceived crisis in the political participation of youth; and

finally, some trends and recommendations for youth empowerment.

Good Governance as an Approach to Youth Empowerment

Empowerment can be described as both a core element and an outcome of good governance. In both cases, there are some basic indicators for measuring the quality of governance: deep respect for the rule of law, transparency in decision-making, mechanisms of accountability, and the promotion of participation in public life.

Moral wisdom deems youth participation to be a major objective in national and global reform policies and strategies. Youth empowerment requires a review of legislation, policies, and practices, from the viewpoint of the current generation, so that youth empowerment is both a means and an end to reform and development.

What is the essence of youth political empowerment? What is its relation to good governance? Three different approaches to youth empowerment and its relation to good governance can be distinguished.
The first, the idealist approach towards youth empowerment maintains that youth problems are those of society as a whole. Accordingly, youth empowerment takes place in the context of society's empowerment. Advocates of this school maintain that the decline in youth participation is a mere symptom of a larger malaise caused partly by a sluggish development of political institutions, and a vulnerability of legislative and executive institutions. Good governance is thus barely present in the power wielded over the political decision-making process.

In light of this approach, the potential of Arab youth remains untapped. Youth are capable of spearheading an Arab renaissance if the social environment governing their behaviour and capacity changes.

Remarkably, both the governing and the opposing elites hold this 'idealist' view, but with different intentions in mind. The latter maintains that the internal environment is the main obstacle (for instance, a lack of political will, existing laws and policies). The governing elite, on the other hand, regards the problem in the external environment (shortage of national natural resources, strategic and economic regional challenges, and external threats to national security).

This school further deems any 'segmentation of democracy' as unnecessary, when tackling issues like 'positive discrimination' for women, religious minorities, or the working class. More important, however, is reforming governance institutions through the principles of rule of law and transparency.

Theorists of the utilitarian approach consider youth problems as separate from those of society at large, and not directly related to good governance. Based on this premise, special attention is given to youth-targeted services, like sports and entertainment activities or building houses for young people. Youth, from this perspective, would benefit more from entering labour markets than from seeking more political freedoms and influence in decision-making.

With this approach, youth are faced with a practical and political dilemma, which places them at the crossroads of youth policy priorities. For instance, they are made to choose between facing unemployment and being an economic problem or reforming labour market mechanisms and being an administrative and political problem.

In these circumstances, youth are compelled to accept a narrow margin of freedoms and political participation on the grounds that they will be granted more space when the economic problem is mitigated against and when financial resources are available to meet youth demands. A political culture is thus promoted justifying the lack of freedom through the provision of more services.

In a third approach, elitist theorists state that there is already a sufficient level of democracy. They market the slogan of 'change before empowerment'. This school advocates a change of youth culture in order for them to absorb the growing space of democracy and freedoms, to become worthy of empowerment and to eventually have the chance to assume key positions. This approach may go too far to declare that youth do not deserve more than what they have, especially when Arab nations are suffering from illiteracy and political challenges. This approach may also contend that Arab nations are governed by tribalism, and consequently Arab youth are not eligible for democracy.

This elitist approach is mostly technocratic because it views empowerment on a par with employment. From this perspective, it gauges youth empowerment by quantitative indicators, which do not reflect, in most cases, the lived experience of youth. Supporters of this view claim that appointing a few youth ministers is evidence of youth political empowerment. They would also contend that the 'political discourse emphasizes youth participation and that society, however, cannot grapple with this discourse'; or that 'a youth council has been established and nobody has the right now to speak on behalf of youth'.

A fourth and preferred concept of youth empowerment has the following ideas in mind: It is vital to avoid generalizations that are not based on facts; and instead adopt critical scientific thinking. Based on this approach, it is imperative to invest in data collection activities and to conduct research on Arab youth prior to launching programmes to promote empowerment. Youth are the primary stakeholders and should express themselves in order to realize the idea of legal justice and should be granted access to decision-making positions and channels of communication. Determining the opinions of youth requires establishing independent polling centers committed to reaching youth. A precise distinction should be made between empowerment and participation. Empowerment refers to 'the rights and duties of both youth and the state'. Diversity among youth should be accepted in any society. More important, however, is to give youth the freedom of choice. This mutually reinforcing relationship between duty and right creates an environment that promotes empowerment. Targeting and universalism are pivotal components to empowerment policies. Empowerment, as a qualitative phenomenon, cannot be reduced to a mere 'youth share' in political and administrative structures or numerical indicators. Reaching the conclusion that empowerment is realized by allocating ministerial posts for youth, regardless of the nature of the mechanism used in choosing those young elements, is inappropriate. It is equally misleading to assume that youth empowerment is not achieved so long as youth do not occupy half the ministerial posts on the ground.

Targeting from this perspective is intended to address discrepancies in youth capacity and to advance the performance of youth who may be falling behind through social development programmes. On the legal level, targeting is an ideological - or perhaps a partisan - issue because the view of empowerment as presented in this paper stresses the collective capacity for action regardless of the results of individual action.

The state ultimately sets the example and takes the lead in supporting empowerment policies. It is necessary to remember that recognizing the role of the state does not preclude the role of civil society or the grassroots therein. The crisis in civil society is described in detail in the Arab Human Development Reports. The State in Arab societies should not hamper the independence of the grassroots necessary to become it's active partners. The UN Arab Human Development Reports give a more detailed analysis of the crisis of civil society.

There are two schools of thought illustrating the concept of good governance. The first school views good governance as inclusive of the fundamental pillars of democracy: rule of law, political and social pluralism, tolerance, freedom of expression, and rights of citizenship. It is thus a modern formula based on well-established principles. The second school also views the adoption of political and economic reforms as necessary to ensure good governance; these reforms include adopting accountability mechanisms to confront public authorities, transparency in decision-making institutions; avenues to assess the quality of governance in light of the principles of the rule of law; enhancing participation and human rights; and fighting corruption. Good governance is thus an attempt to set an operational definition for abstract concepts in order to support the responsiveness of complex political institutions, such as the parliament and other levels of the government. This second school views certain reforms as necessary ingredients in encouraging a real transition in governance. Such reforms facilitate more efficient evaluation of governance and policy-making, especially in countries undergoing rapid economic and social changes.

There is a clear relationship between the process and mechanisms of good governance and youth empowerment as they represent the establishment of an institutional framework that embodies political values, which grant the individual the freedom of choice. Moreover, good governance enhances a country's competitiveness and contributes to the development of human and institutional capacity. Good governance is manifest in the following forms:

1- Rule of law: The rule of law is realized through combating discrimination and working to eliminate corruption and entrenched systems of patronage. Without the enforcement of the rue of law, youth are denied equal opportunities to participate in their societies and develop their capacities. The rule of law supports equitable opportunities not only in the areas of employment, investment and economic development, but also in student unions, exams for candidates for research positions and scholarships abroad.

2- Transparency and accountability: Transparency and accountability are achieved by abolishing the politicization of education and curricula and through providing free access to information, and opening political institutions and policy-making bodies to the voices of youth for better decision making.

3- Participation: Greater participation of youth is attainable through lifting barriers that prevent youth from expressing themselves, encouraging youth to participate in political parties and civil society, reducing the tendency for seclusion produced by depression, and reconsidering the age when one may engage in the political process (such as voting in elections or holding office).

The process of adopting mechanisms of good governance is not entirely smooth or linear, especially not for youth. Youth empowerment is dependent on a system of good governance where power is not concentrated into the hands of one group or an individual, neither of whom are held accountable.

Is there a Crisis of Youth Political Participation?

Eradicating poverty and illiteracy among youth are basic objectives of the MDGs and top priorities of the World Programme of Action for Youth. These are rooted in the view that recognizing the needs of youth and activating their role is essential to development and good governance. However, the overall situation in Arab states reflects a severe deficiency in youth empowerment. The recent Series of Arab Human Development Reports consider this situation a daunting challenge. Five elements illustrating the crisis of political empowerment of youth can be distinguished.

First Element: Confusion

A state of confusion haunts Arab youth who see a huge wave of change continue to sweep over the rest of the world while their countries are at a standstill or are undergoing a process of slow change. However, we remain incapable of providing an alternative environment and culture. Youth confusion is accompanied by anxiety and an inclination towards the known and familiar.

Globalisation is a double-edged sword since it benefits some people and harms others. Some argue that globalisation is an inevitable process with inescapable negative and positive consequences. Others believe that it is an expression of the hegemony of global financial and economic centers.

A state of confusion haunts Arab youth who see a huge wave of change continue to sweep over the rest of the world while their countries are at a standstill or are undergoing a process of slow change.

This state of confusion about global changes is further aggravated when youth stand in confusion at a crossroads. They often wonder if they can cope with change and take advantage of new opportunities and choices. Some may wonder whether they should reject the entire process. As a result, youth may feel alienated from the process of globalisation.

Are Arab youth confident about what they can accomplish? Do the governing elites have confidence in them? Self-confidence, which is related to individual and environmental factors, is essential to increase voluntary participation and to raise awareness among young participants in the process. However, the governing elite's perceptions of the capacity of youth are also vital to strengthening the development of youth.

What is confusing here is the widening gap between how youth see themselves and how governing elites see them. Such a gap triggers a barrage of questions: what separates youth from the political elite? When does this situation change? What is the difference between Arab youth and youth worldwide? If social, economic, and historical factors are believed to be the cause of a slower pace of development, what is the relation of backward internal social conditions to the failure of Arab governments to reach a decision on a summit conference?

For many reasons, young Arabs become adults - both in the sense of personal self-determination and on a political level- later in life than their counterparts elsewhere. Extreme poverty and inequitable opportunities compel them to engage in a fervent quest for self-redemption. Youth thus travel a long journey to reach a reasonable point of satisfaction only to discover that old age has crept into their lives and the glow of youth has flickered away. This pattern can lead to tensions in the interactions among generations. Youth are often skeptical about their capacity to escape the fate of the generation that precedes them.

Dialogue with youth reveals another dimension to their confusion; although youth
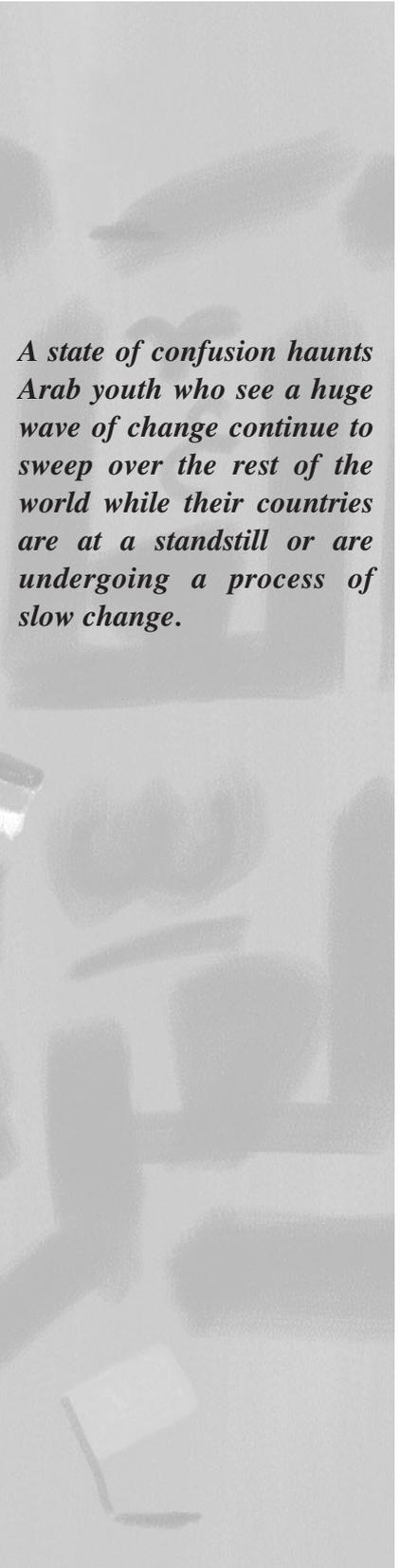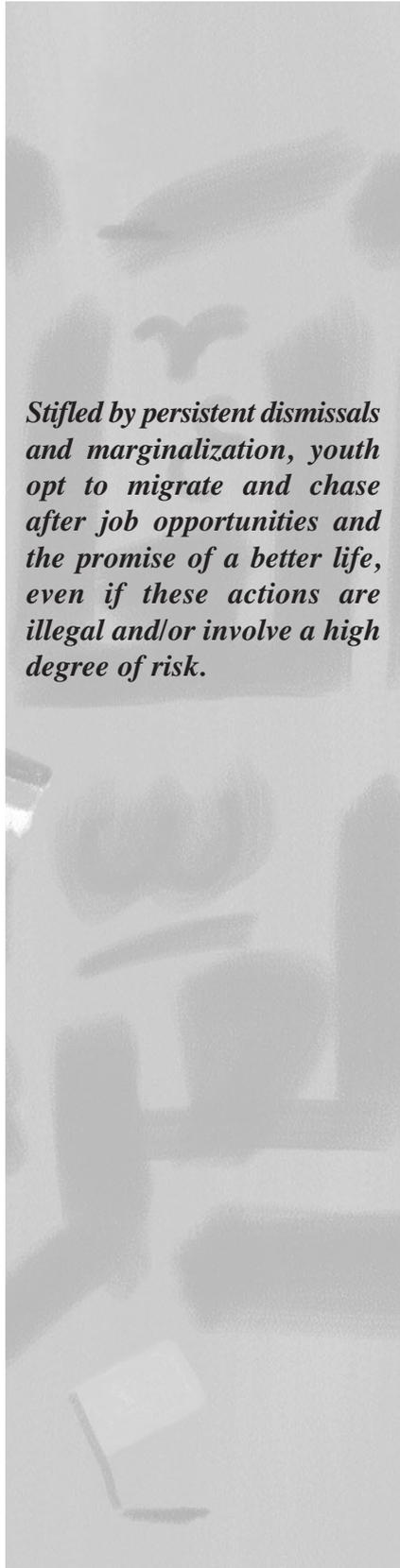
Stifled by persistent dismissals and marginalization, youth opt to migrate and chase after job opportunities and the promise of a better life, even if these actions are illegal and/or involve a high degree of risk.

ask for simple demands such as the right to self-expression so that their voices are heard and training programmes, a stubborn dismissal is the usual response they encounter from the governing elite. The recurring question now is: who is in control? Who is well informed of the best interests of youth? Who provides protection in the face of power? Why should the governing elite's vision of internal and external affairs be the only one considered viable?

The situation of public universities is a case in point. These universities are caught between their role of cultivating skills required for the workplace and open dialogue and their preoccupation with bureaucratic and security concerns which hamper their ability to foster human development. Universities in the Arab world are thus reduced to machines which produce a population that does not fit easily into the developmental equation. Investing in youth, preparing them to shoulder the responsibilities of adulthood and strengthening their role in society, are essential measures for States to take, so that youth can genuinely become both the tools and the foundation of development. Stifled by persistent dismissals and marginalization, youth opt to migrate and chase after job opportunities and the promise of a better life, even if these actions are illegal and/or involve a high degree of risk.

The media add a new dimension to their state of confusion. Some youth have made the transition from a consumerist to an interactive relationship with the media. In non-traditional or new media, youth are granted the space to freely express themselves, use the language they prefer, present themselves the way they are, and, attain the information they need. Eventually, the satellite media won out over traditional media.

Many questions remain unanswered at this time: Are there data and reliable statistics on the use of the media? Are such studies permitted? How do youth regard their image as it is portrayed in the formal media? Are the images of youth in traditional media fabricated while in the informal media they are more genuine? Do traditional media promote confusion among the youth?

Second Element: Seclusion

While the first state is replete with young people persistently asking questions about their identity and about the nature of their surrounding environment, the second state, seclusion, can accompany or follow confusion. Seclusion may be experienced as a reaction to confusion or to limited outlets for self-expression. The drive for participation may wane as youth tire of searching for these channels. Seclusion may also be an intended consequence of policy and have the effect of choking youth aspirations. For example, shunning political dialogue and indulging in entertainment programmes instead, may produce serious malaise and isolation. The roots of this isolation can be found in four areas.

First, there appears to be a polarization between old formal frameworks and new ones. The result may be a disproportionate relation between sheer stagnation in youth participation in the formal context and rapid change in the informal context. However, it is difficult to know what happens secretly in youth circles. Some of these secrets may only be revealed after harm has been inflicted. Consider, for example, some of the dangerous consequences of seclusion such as addiction, drug abuse, groups which espouse political extremism (i.e. favouring violence), or organisations that operate within clandestine frameworks, which manage to attract rather than repel youth.

Second, there are great discrepancies between the priorities of youth and those imposed by the elite. As a result of this gap, youth may become isolated. In an attempt to fill the gap, global mass media has managed to capture the attentions of youth who shun the formal media. In its attempt to join the race for the youth audience, traditional media has started to conform to the methods and practices of new media.

Third, there appears to be a structural gap in perceptions concerning what youth can achieve. Though reform is still limited and youth participation in formal contexts has been modest, progress is often overstated. When youth are kept outside the circle of decision-making, a culture of isolation becomes prevalent among youth. Looking at the Arab legal paradigm, the constitutions of 14 countries do not refer to youth. Constitutions which do refer to them focus mainly on their protection. Although Arab governments encourage youth empowerment especially in political institutions, there are no structural divisions of Arab parliaments - not even a committee - tasked with formulating an integrated youth policy.

Finally, a strong culture of seclusion is up against weak empowerment mechanisms. Extreme trends and deviant currents emerge at times when there is a shortage of legitimate mechanisms for youth empowerment. The resulting effects of isolation on youth tend to snowball over time. Evidence shows that Arab countries allocate more funds to security bodies than to free civic education institutions. Moreover, they continuously fail to curtail or contain youth feelings of isolation.

The gap between youth and their governments calls for direct and meaningful intervention. When youth become truly isolated they are reluctant to participate in any aspect of political life due to frustration and skepticism about their ability to affect change. On the other hand, empowerment can effectively challenge a culture of seclusion and create conditions conducive to participation.

Third Element: Division

Persistent isolation leads to entrenched divisions, either between the elite and society; or between youth and the political process. The political system and the governing elite may intentionally adopt a policy that excludes any participation, thus creating a culture of division which is ultimately not in their interest.

There is a plethora of studies on social and psychological alienation, especially among youth. Alienation breads emotions of fear, loneliness, insecurity and lack of communication with others. As a result, youth feel confirmed in their belief that they lack a certain level of maturity, are victims of conflicting societal pressures, and are not able to control the events that affect their lives. Consequently, youth lose confidence in themselves, may become passive, suffer from anxiety, and experience feelings of marginalisation. Some may express their ordeal through violence; others may become socially withdrawn and retreat into perceived idealistic notions of the past.

The split between the religious and the secular elements of society also appears to intensify divisions. Probably the most common among youth, splits along the lines of religious adherence exist among groups with homogenous social and economic interests. Such divisions are even more common than those due to wealth, class, or profession.

The split between the religious and the secular elements of society also appears to intensify divisions. Probably the most common among youth, splits along the lines of religious adherence exist among groups with homogenous social and economic interests. Such divisions are even more common than those due to wealth, class, or profession. Private universities, for example, are confined to the privileged. Public
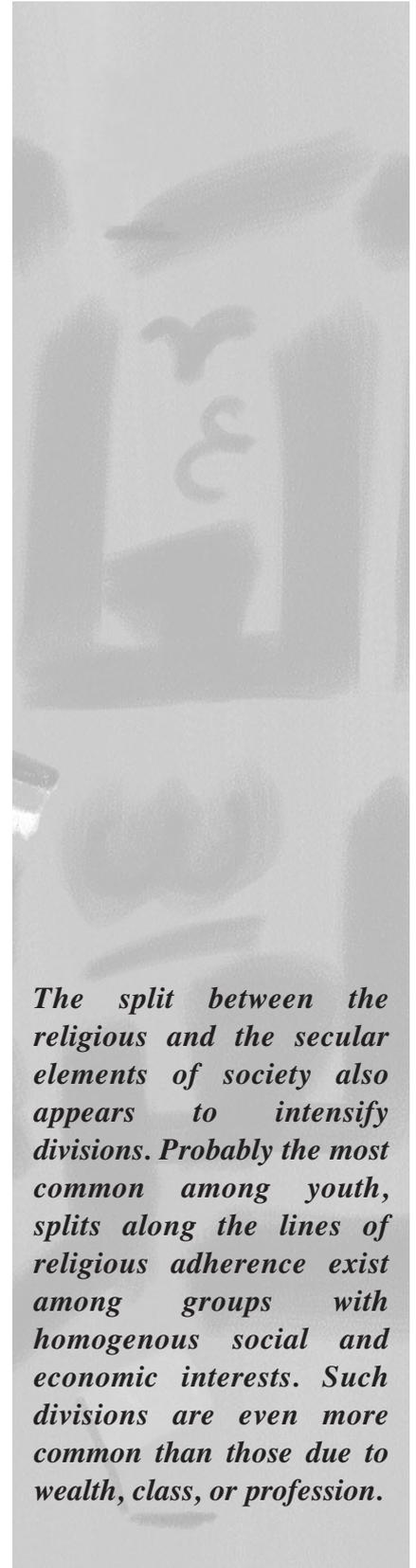
universities, on the other hand, are accessible to the middle and the lower classes. Youth in both types of universities differ substantially on issues such as the quality of education, services, facilities, and competitiveness in labour markets. Both share in common, however, the growing chasm between 'religious' and 'secular' groups (in the political rather than the juristic sense). Hence, youth participation becomes an important social and national requirement as well as a basis for good governance.

Clearly there are degrees of variance between approval and total rejection of formal frameworks for youth participation. The main danger, however, lies in the fluctuation between these two poles and in the spread of a divisive cultural environment. The question here focuses on whether it is possible to bridge this gap and find a middle ground? And if so, how? The stance here should not be to deny this division.

Youth should be able to contribute to the formulation and development of the mechanisms through which they participate. Their input is necessary for promoting a culture where a diverse array of interests is represented and legitimate civic participation is possible. For instance, youth should be involved in the board of directors in colleges, schools, and institutes, and their voices should be heard in evaluating teachers' performance, the curricula, teaching methodologies, and exam dates. Youth should be engaged in direct parliamentary discussions that focus on legislation important to them, rather than relying solely on the opinion of the minister or governmental leadership tasked with youth issues.

One's outlook for the future is shaped by the challenges and opportunities one encounters in daily life. Arab youth often consider the conditions of their societies and make comparisons with the situation in the East or West; they compare themselves to their counterparts in the developed world. They also look at the contrast between the ready-made solutions presented as answers to their problems (derived from history or religion) and those that are forged by real-life situations. Youth may grope for explanations to a flood of inconsistencies and paradoxes that seem to be drowning their societies. Thus, a form of psychological/political split takes places whereby youth are torn between aspiring to participate and bring about reform, and pessimistic attitudes about their ability to influence and a refusal to participate in the formal structures. Confrontation thus often occurs between the youth themselves rather than between them and the governing elite.

When youth ask who is responsible for the current situation, another division becomes apparent. One group blames youth by saying they lack ambition, do not take the initiative to establish democracy, do not possess the stamina needed for reform, and ignore the harsh circumstances of their societies, which suffer from a shortage in resources, due to economically destructive wars and the spread of tribalism and illiteracy. The other group blames the government for pushing them, through its exclusionary and patriarchal attitudes and policies, into defiance, delinquency or extreme behaviour. The government, they maintain, diminishes opportunity for self-expression and ambition, does not set an example of promoting the rule of law or providing equal opportunity under the law, and only superficially employs youth as accessories to preserve its power and prolong its tenure.

The question is: are youth required to participate more effectively in the existing frameworks or shall the frameworks be changed to promote more youth participation?

The problem does not lie with one party or the other. Youth should take the initiative

and participate, and governments should create the favorable circumstances and the legitimate channels for their empowerment.

Fourth Element: Conflict

When there are shifts in the balance of the divisive trends among youth, and certain push factors prevail, division and separation are transformed into conflict. This conflict may be internal (among youth, as previously mentioned) or external (between youth and the governing elite). Furthermore, it could be overt or covert. What counts is how to address this conflict.

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of generational conflict in Arab societies pertains to the tension between the interests of the individual and the group. This tension is evident when the elite prioritize group interests over those of the individual (wherein 'wisdom' becomes the prerogative of the elite, which speaks in the name of the group). Youth are thus portrayed as 'lacking the wisdom' required to make decisions since they are driven solely by individualistic impulses.

Against the backdrop of a patriarchal culture that has long justified neglecting the demands of youth, global media and communications have given youth more freedom and a lens to see the world outside their society, thus leading them to experience relatively more independence. When compared to the available formal channels, modern media and communications, in this context, give youth more space to achieve higher levels of participation.

Who speaks on behalf of youth - youth themselves or their government? What should be the criteria for nominating youth for activities, contests or international grants? Governments may resort to political criteria that confine nomination to youth who are loyal to the regime without paying any attention to principles of transparency and equal opportunity. The reality of the situation becomes obvious when many youth find that a predetermined few are given access to such aid or grants.

These privileged youth, as a result, secure the prominent positions. With this system in place, the elite are continuously regenerating themselves.

The latter prompts international organisations themselves to seek youth who are qualified for their programmes. They may use the same selective criteria which are non-transparent (in spite of the fact that they call for the reverse of this) and limited to a certain clientele at the exclusion of others, according to their agenda requirements (e.g. preferences for those who speak a specific foreign language or who represent a certain religious or ethnic group). In such a case, a political issue surfaces, and external intervention in internal affairs is raised as an issue to be opposed.

Conflict over 'priorities' is often rooted in the discrepancy between the perspectives of the governing elite and youth. The government tends to adopt limited, stereotyped and static priorities (physical sports academies, scout festivals, art contests and television programmes for youth) whereas the priorities of youth are wide, diverse, and mutable. Each point of view may seem reasonable, legitimate and feasible. Still, only the government possesses the tools and the ability to enforce and implement their desired actions.

Amid isolation and division, priorities are naturally diverse, heterogeneous and

sometimes contradictory. This is precisely what Arab youth suffer. So while some are seeking opportunities to save them from abject poverty, others seek channels of political participation. While yet others may actually favour seclusion. Simply acknowledging the importance of youth participation is not the same as taking actual steps to bring this about in political life.

Learning how to participate through practice and acquiring the experience necessary will help youth define their priorities and devise the methods of implementation. Youth participation enhances their ability to come together and precisely define their common priorities.

In a local, regional, and international context of 'change', there is increasing scope for social and political debate among the calls for change and policies of reform. Youth are not far removed from this discourse nor should there be 'sudden' steps towards reform, such that the governments' calls for youth participation lead to a culture of 'change for the sake of change'. A real desire for reform on the part of many youth collides with government's desire for measures that do not really affect its interests as it becomes increasingly wary of genuine youth empowerment, and fearful of the latter's 'unstudied' choices.

In some Arab societies, government elites criticize the demands of youth regarding the pace of change by pointing out, "the risk of democracy in one dose.' Youth, on the other hand, have a different view. They point out a government's failure to fulfil a promise of political empowerment and good governance. They see that their ability to reach decision-making positions will translate into greater participation and lessen confusion, division, seclusion, and conflict among youth. They also regard such changes as a way to strengthen their role in the process of development and stability.

Fifth Element: Preparedness and Uncontrollability

Do Arab youth appear to have become volatile? Are we witnessing a turning point in the transformation of the political systems and methods of governance in Arab countries led by the new generation? Or are we experiencing "growing pains' in the establishment of a society where Arab youth participate as agents and partners in the political reform process?

Because many political elites have survived for so long, one could argue that the current youth generation is prevented from being absorbed into the system which renders them potentially uncontrollable–behaviorally and politically. Governments warn against moving or jumping towards the unknown, while youth appear to be ready to jump. One might notice that the opposition leaders are younger, more courageous, and more popular than the political elites. This is apparent when such leadership of opposition groups addresses the deficiencies in the performance of ruling elites as far as good governance and democracy are concerned.

Trends and Suggestions for Youth Empowerment

One should not doubt the importance of the role of governments in devising 'a national youth policy' which includes: creating new job opportunities; vocational and training programmes; the provision of fair job opportunities for all; promoting the creativity of small-scale entrepreneurs; protecting the environment, making the best use of information technology to serve the needs of marginalised youth; and

reaching all underprivileged people by empowering them through the development of their knowledge and skills.

Some ask why we should call for the establishment of a ministry for youth when the whole world is calling for decentralization and the abolishment of inflated ministries (e.g. the ministries of economy and information). Others believe that though the ministries are organisational frameworks for the implementation of general policies, they are not the only means. National councils also act as coordinating bodies. In addition, there is also partnership between the government and civil society for policy implementation (this is most evident in environmental conservation and women's empowerment policies). Moreover, youth-specific policies are vital to address the national challenges pertaining to the provision of equal opportunity for all in line with their potential and ambitions. Hence, state institution need to be flexible and adaptable to change.

Enhancing the performance of youth-related institutions is crucial in the implementation of a national youth policy, as is the development of such institutional capacities through better leadership and employee training, modernizing working tools, and enhancing their accountability.. The national youth policy must stem from a genuine desire to satisfy the needs and aspirations of youth. This can be achieved by working not only for youth, but with youth.

A national youth policy should include the following key features:
a. A focus on partnership among all concerned parties, namely, youth networks, non-governmental youth organisations, and other institutions.
b. Access to decision-making and legislative authorities.
c. The establishment of communication channels with youth so that they may express themselves at national, regional and international levels.
d. Respect for the cultural characteristics of each society.
e. Special attention to the grassroots forces in society, especially in the area of educational policies.
f. Reinforcement of all educational opportunities.
g. The provision of a forum for generations to meet through facilitating the building of and partnerships and strengthen bonds among different people.

There is no doubt that the fulfillment of this mission necessitates a set of policies and programmes that provide human and financial resources capable of translating these policies into action. This may be achieved by:
1- Reconsidering educational programmes to combine theoretical studies together with practical and technical studies to equip graduates of high school with the necessary theoretical experience and knowledge-base.
2- Reconsidering the methods used in training and developing the leaders, educators and instructors of youth, such that they are qualified to become distinguished Arab role models for the new generation.
3- Educating Arab youth about democratic values and respect for human rights and giving them a wider participatory role in the decision-making process and in representative institutions.
4- Encouraging Arab youth to open up to other cultures and civilizations and directing them towards objective scientific criticism and motivating debate.
Certain conclusions can be drawn which would support efforts to empower Arab youth.

First, it has become a well-established fact that youth possess specific interests and needs of their own, which must be taken into account in the development of general policies and in the reform process in all its dimensions. These reform policies and processes should aim at redressing the current deficiency in government investment in youth, in order for the community to grow and develop. However, this should not simply entail 'tailoring' a constitution or a law for youth. Rather, it is an issue of consistent policies. A more comprehensive approach to youth development is required.

Second, there is a disparity in the priorities of youth and those of the elites and of the establishment which persistently focus primarily on sports and arts rather than on the provision of job opportunities or channels for participation. However, this paper advocates for 'trusting the choices made by youth' and allowing them to define their priorities. This emanates from the belief that experience is acquired through practice, and patience with youth is important to give them a chance to experiment and learn from their mistakes. The question is not 'what do we want for youth?' but 'what do youth want for themselves?' Focusing on the latter requires going back to youth and using all possible means to learn about their priorities, assess their abilities, and develop their skills.

Third, it is necessary to develop data bases so that accurate information can inform youth empowerment policies; these data bases should also be able to monitor and evaluate the impact of policies on the lives of youth, particularly in relation to the scope of targeted youth, the fields of data and the timing of data collection. There are several models of comprehensive data bases worldwide, which provide ample information about youth. The development of similar data bases that look at Arab youth should be feasible. For instance, to design a good policy that motivates youth to participate, it is necessary to know about their political behavior. This will not be an easy task as long as the rolls of voters or ballot boxes do not provide this information. Sample-based research is still complicated and controversial in the Arab world. A central problem is the limited role played by independent research centers, public opinion surveys and field studies in developing reliable data on youth.

Fourth and finally, it is necessary for Arab countries to complete their civic data bases (e.g. identity cards) and to adopt tools of referencing various forms of youth participation in public life. These databases should be updated through the periodic collection and updating of information. These should be able to demonstrate the percentage of youth registered to vote; the actual voter turnout amongst them; their membership in political parties; numbers occupying key posts in various institutions; in addition to indicating their social status, profession and level of education.
It is also important to enable public opinion polls and social surveys from a multitude of perspectives: political, legal, organisational and security-wise. This information can be put to good use in determining the investment in human resources, technical capacity and viability of institutions. These are critical steps in correcting our knowledge and understanding of youth.
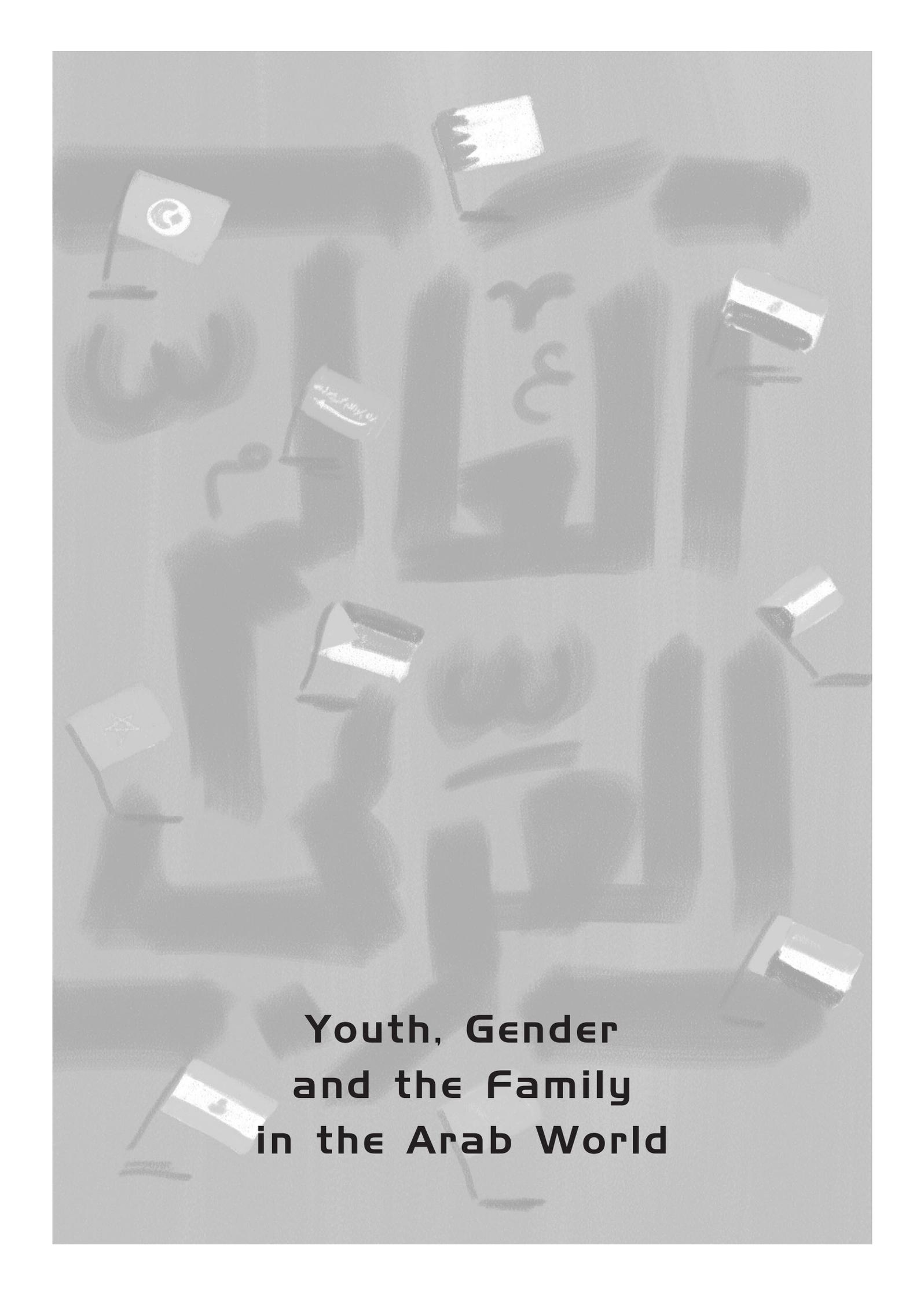
Youth, Gender
and the Family
in the Arab World

Youth, Gender and the Family in the Arab World[1]

Jocelyn De Jong and Bonnie Shepard

Introduction: Regional Context

Because of past fertility trends, the Arab countries are now facing a unique demographic moment. Never before have there been so many young people in comparison to other age-groups. The age group 10 to 24 now comprises approximately one-third of the total population of the region; this proportion is as high as 36 percent in Syria, and 38 percent in Kuwait. Across the Arab countries, and particularly in North Africa, the average age at marriage has been rising for both sexes for a number of social and economic reasons. In Tunisia, the average age at marriage is the highest in the region, at 29 for women and 33 for men. This trend of later age at marriage, combined with a global trend in earlier age of puberty onset, has exposed young people to greater health risks.

Educational levels have also risen rapidly, which together with greater exposure to the norms of global culture often create rifts between generations, particularly as social networks become more fragmented with greater urbanization and rapid social change. This generation gap deprives young people of the counselling and support they need from adults. At the same time, young people's unemployment in this region is the highest in the world- 25.6 percent of young people 15 to 24 are actively searching for work[i] owing to this "youth bulge" in the population. This situation stifles opportunities to improve standards of living for the broadening cohorts of educated young people and creates widespread frustration, with multiple negative consequences both for young people themselves and for their societies.

Despite the above trends and increasing evidence of unmet needs among youth, both the literature reviewed for this document and the views of experts interviewed confirm that that there has been a lack of sufficient policy attention to the needs of this group in the region. This policy silence is exacerbated by a lack of a research-base, particularly on how young people themselves perceive and are experiencing these rapid and extensive social changes. Only since the late 1990s has some population-based data become available, such as independent nationally representative youth and development surveys in Egypt, Jordan, The Occupied Palestinian Territories and Syria. Moreover, recently the Arab League has initiated a series of "youth modules" in their Pan Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM) surveys which sample, for the first time, young unmarried people (discussed further below under research).

Media characterization of youth from the Arab countries as somehow "politically dangerous", both within and outside the region, has obscured the need for positive attention to their needs, perspectives and aspirations. El Tawila distinguishes between the "deviant" paradigm of youth with its negative expectations of youth that prevails in the region and the new development approach recognizing young people's strengths and potential.[ii] Thus there is a need to focus not only on young people's problems but rather to explore equally the positive aspects of this period of young people's lives as identities are forged, relationships fostered and for many, families are started. UNDP's Arab Human Development Report of 2002 appropriately stresses the key potential contribution of this age group to the future of Arab societies, and consequently notes the loss represented by not dealing with their needs more explicitly. It cites findings

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from a survey of youth conducted for that report, for example, that there is a high desire for emigration among youth. Although the sample for this survey was small, and further in-depth research is needed, it is clear that both economic and social reasons underlie this trend.

1. Sources of Data for this Study

The paper is based on a review of unpublished, grey and published literature and interviews in person in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia, and by telephone with key informants in other countries of the region. Overall, 51 interviews were conducted, including nine with people working at the regional or international level, with expertise on adolescent sexual and reproductive health programmes in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza, Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Oman, Bahrain, Djibouti and Syria. All interviews were open-ended but guided by a set of standard questions concerning interviewees' perceptions of the main challenges facing youth; key sexual and reproductive health issues; perceived risk and protective factors; strategies for overcoming challenges; existing programmes serving youth (whether governmental or not) and the evidence needed to support programmes. There are a number of possible biases in the choice of interviewees: firstly, government representatives were relatively under-represented as compared to personnel of non-governmental organisations; secondly, the interviewees support such programmes; and thirdly, interviewees from the Persian Gulf tended to be under-represented and those from Egypt and Tunisia over-represented in comparison with other countries.

The paper first reviews the demographic, political and social context of young people's well-being before turning to analysis of existing demographic trends, particularly focusing on marriage patterns. It also provides up to date data on young people's reproductive health status. It then addresses research gaps on young people's well-being and takes a future look to what programmes have and could be effective in this cultural context for addressing some of the gaps identified in the paper. It concludes with recommendations in the areas of policy, programmes and research.

2. The Political Context of Young People's Well-Being in the Region

An analysis of the needs of young people in the Arab countries cannot fail to address the particular historical and political circumstances of the region. Over the last twenty-five years, the region has experienced major conflicts and political upheavals, from the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88, Gulf crises and wars in both 1990 and 2003, civil war in Sudan from 1983, civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990) and political unrest in both Egypt and Algeria, to the present, continuing unrest and lack of political resolution in The Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Iraq. For many years sanctions with strong socio-economic implications have also been imposed on both Libya and Iraq.

Widespread conflict has resulted in untold numbers of casualties and people with disabilities, as well as broken families and orphans. Destabilization and disruption of the provision of health and education services is not the only outcome of prolonged conflict. Such conditions often lead to a breakdown in social networks and solidarity, thus undermining some of the main mechanisms protective of young people's health and development, including their sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, the

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[1] Editor's Note: This paper was commissioned by UNICEF for this publication. It has undergone practically no substantive editing.

mobility associated with conflict is itself a risk factor for the transmission of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. In Sudan, for example, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has largely been driven by civil war in that country. The war-torn south of the country is on one of the main HIV-belts of Sub-Saharan Africa, and both widespread poverty and conflict have led to the emergence of a commercial sex industry there. The persistence of conflict weakens and disrupts government and public health surveillance capacity. Thus the transmission of infection to soldiers from the north of the country, and ultimately to their wives, remains unchecked.

Sexual violence often increases in contexts of armed conflict. In Iraq, Human Rights Watch has documented a sharp rise in the incidence of sexual violence against women and young girls in Baghdad after the fall of the Ba'athist regime, for which the legal system, health services and other services are singularly unprepared.[iii] To date, there has been little international assistance to address these concerns.

The effects of conflict or civil unrest on young people may be more subtle and difficult to discern. In a study in The Occupied Palestinian Territories, for example, Khawaja found that there was a rise in adolescent fertility at the time of the first intifada (or uprising against Israeli occupation) from 1987 - 1990, a trend associated with a declining age at marriage for girls during that period. While further qualitative research is needed to investigate the reasons for this trend, the uncertainty and anxiety produced by political conflict may be one factor motivating parents to have their children married early.[iv] Palestinian interviewees for this report repeatedly state that the threat of violence, disruption to education and health services, inability to move from place to place and other consequences of the ongoing conflict are some of the main impediments to developing programmes to serve youth.[v]

Both the UNDP Arab Human Development Report of 2002[vi] and the World Bank report on governance in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region[vii] point to the poor quality of institutions, political accountability and governance in the MENA region as a main feature holding back development. Despite evident demands for greater political participation, citizens of the region remain, to varying degrees, subject to under-representation within political systems that have been slow to reform. This situation applies equally to young people, most of whom do not have channels to participate in policy formation affecting their lives. In most Arab countries the legal voting age is 18, although young people must wait till they are 20 to vote in Tunisia and till 21 in Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman and Saudi Arabia.[viii] Oman has recently lowered the voting age for women from 30 to 21.[ix] Of the three countries in the world that deny both men and women the right to vote, two are in the region (Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates); Bahrain only gave women the vote in 2001 and Kuwait is the most recent country to give women the vote, in 2005.[x]

The demographer, Philippe Fargues, in an analysis of the relationship between Arab demographic trends and political trends, has argued that the roots of political violence in the region relate to the combination of persistent paternalism with increasing differences in education between generations; the younger generation has the advantage in terms of education but the older generation still commands greatest authority and is living longer.[xi] The ensuing generation gap deprives young people of "connectedness" to supportive adults — a key protective factor for their health and development.

Social policy in the region remains a contested area given this political context and competing views over the appropriate role of religion in social policy. Young people are subject to strong religious and cultural norms in the region, and their behaviour - particularly that of young girls — is often highly scrutinized. Policy to address this age group is thus of utmost sensitivity.

3. Cultural and Social Context: Risk and Protective Factors for Youth

The Arab countries demonstrate considerable gender disparities in access to education, social opportunities and political participation. Indeed the region ranks next to last (behind Sub-Saharan Africa) on UNDP's gender empowerment measure.[xii] More than half of Arab women are illiterate. The region also has the lowest rate of female labour-force participation (26 percent) of any region in the world.[xiii] Such statistics, however, under-estimate the extent of women's participation in the informal sector and do not capture the rapid increase in both education and women's labour-force participation in recent years.

The trend towards an increased presence of women both in the work force and in education, particularly in urban areas, has strained traditional gender norms where women's roles were largely confined to the domestic sphere. This frequently prompts a defensive reaction on the part of conservative forces to tighten restrictions on women's mobility. These constraints apply particularly to the case of girls and young women -- both married and unmarried–and, in turn, translate into a lack of opportunities to develop, to protect their health, to access education, programmes, services, recreation, and indeed to participate in public life.

With urbanization and social change, the structure of households in the region is also in a state of flux. The traditionally dominant extended family form is increasingly giving way to nuclearisation, especially in urban areas.[xiv] Within both extended and nuclear households, however, the region is characterized by strong stratification of roles and authority along the lines of both gender and age. Within extended families, the mother-in-law often plays a key role in household decision-making, and typically, her daughter-in-law is weakest in power until childbearing proceeds and her age advances.[xv] Brothers are also disproportionately powerful within the household, and are socialized to see it as their responsibility to defend family honour, especially as it pertains to the social and sexual behaviour of their unmarried sisters.[xvi]

Interviewees contacted for this study observed that family life in the region is changing because of migration, busy lives and changes in lifestyle brought by the mass media and consumerism.[xvii] They expressed concern that families are therefore not playing the traditional protective and information-providing roles they once did, and that young people as a consequence lack adult role models. While some studies reveal that young people would prefer obtaining information about puberty and their health from their parents, the latter are often reluctant to provide it. Interestingly, a nationally representative survey of young people and their parents in Egypt found that although 42 percent of fathers with adolescent sons aged 10 to 19 indicate they talked to their sons about pubertal changes, only 7 percent of boys who reported knowing something about puberty changes learned from their fathers.[xviii]

Despite these numerous political and social constraints to the realization of policies and programmes for youth in the region, there is evidence of considerable ingenuity on the part of young people to communicate, forge relationships and even address

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some of these controversial topics.[xix] In many respects, young people have capitalized the most on Globalisation and the communications revolution, and are forming new social networks through mobile telephones and the Internet. According to a former minister of information technology in Egypt, most of the Internet users are young.[xx] In Egypt, new sites are becoming accessible to young people that allow them to deal with stigmatized issues (ibid). Nevertheless, the freedom of information that is actually available in some countries of the region is variable, and there are reports of Internet surveillance by the State leading to loss of confidentiality in some settings.[xxi]

Less emphasized in discussions about youth in the region are the many protective elements intrinsic to the current social context in the region. First and foremost, the strong emphasis on the integrity and strength of the family unit prevailing within social and religious discourses in the region is favourable for the sexual and reproductive health of young people. In particular, an international overview of studies on protective and risk factors for young people's health showed that a positive relationship with parents is very important in protecting young people from sexual and reproductive health risks and other risks such as drug abuse.[xxii] Similarly, a strong sense of social solidarity of many communities across the region provides young people with a sense of self-worth and identity that is key to protecting their sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, there is some evidence that young girls and boys in the region do not suffer from some of the problems reported among young people in other regions. For example, a nationally representative study of adolescents in Egypt found that only 12.4 percent of adolescents (12.8 for girls and 12.1 for boys) reported having a negative body image for any reason.[xxiii]

Some aspects of gender roles, while in a state of flux, function positively for young women. For example, while the increasingly widespread phenomenon of veiling has attracted much negative attention, it may bring increased access for women to both education and the work-place by reducing familial and social opposition to their studying or working outside the home.   Similarly, the predominant model in the region of single-sex schools, particularly at the secondary level, has been a facilitating factor for greater access of girls to education.

Having spiritual beliefs and regular religious attendance has been identified by WHO as a protective factor for young people's health and development.[xxiv] Religious values in the region also protect young people's sexual and reproductive health by connecting them with a supportive multi-generational community, and by discouraging behaviour that would put them at risk. Islam in particular, as a number of authors have argued, plays a positive role in sexual health in its recognition of the importance of sexual fulfilment for both men and women independent of procreation.[xxv]   There are diverse interpretations of religion across the region, however, and as Makhlouf-Obermeyer has argued using case-studies of reproductive choice in Iran and Tunisia "Like other religious doctrines, Islam has been used to legitimate conflicting positions on gender and reproductive choice."[xxvi]

4. Marriage Patterns

When, how and whom young people marry in the region is central to any discussion of the sexual and reproductive health of young people, and yet the trends are contradictory. On the one hand, the age of marriage is rising for both men and women, yet on the other hand, social norms value marriage highly. The religious and social sanctions against pre-marital and extramarital sexuality place significant pressure on

young people to marry early and start families immediately. A premium is placed on virginity before marriage, particularly of girls, which is reflected in the traditionally widespread but now waning practice of producing the 'blood-stained' sheet on the wedding night and in the more modern (but under-researched) practices of medical virginity tests and hymen repair operations.[xxvii] Religion plays an important role in the choice of partner for Muslims and Christians alike, both for social and religious reasons and due to legal sanctions against inter-faith marriages. Divorce is generally stigmatized, although this has been abating somewhat in recent years. Contrary to popular conception, divorce rates have been declining in recent years, according to survey data.[xxviii]

While, there is tremendous diversity in marriage patterns in the region (although these remain relatively under-researched), certain general recent trends characterise the whole region. These include:

- Rising age at marriage for both males and females;
- Early marriage still a problem in pockets of all societies;
- High incidence of consanguineous marriages;
- Persistence, but decline, in polygamy in some countries;
- Higher numbers of single women;
- Resurgence of forms of non-conventional marriage.

The rising age of marriage in the region is a positive sign -- particularly for women — in that it is protective against early childbirth and is associated with greater educational and employment opportunities; at the same time the greater period between onset of menarche and marriage is a risk factor for premarital and unprotected sexual activity. Without sufficient information or education, young unmarried people engaging in sexual relations are exposed to significant risks. Moreover, given prevailing social norms, a young single woman in an Arab country who becomes pregnant due to lack of information about or ability to negotiate use of contraception is placed in a highly difficult and marginalised position, and in extreme cases may be subject to violence from male family members. Although the increased average age at marriage has been widely documented in population-based surveys across the region, there has been relatively little research on the reasons for this trend.[xxix] Interviewees and anecdotal evidence point to increased educational opportunities, economic deterioration and the rising cost of housing, as well as the improved social status of women as possible explanations. In a nationally representative survey of adolescents aged 10 to 19 in Egypt, when parents were asked about the main problems facing youth, 59 percent identified buying housing for marriage, 21 percent replied that youth lacked money and 10 percent identified problems in furnishing the marital home.[xxx] Certainly the rise in age at marriage for women is also closely linked to education; the chances of an uneducated woman in the region being married at ages 20-24 - are approximately twice those of educated women of the same age.33 Rashad argues that the contribution of changing marriage patterns to the fertility transition in Arab countries is a subject that has received little research attention in comparison to other factors such as contraceptive use.[xxxi]

Expectations that women - Muslim and Christian — will marry their first (parallel patrilineal) cousin remain ingrained in many parts of the region. Consanguinity in marriage ranges from a low of 18 percent in Lebanon to a high of 56 percent in Sudan,[xxxii] and in seven countries of the region at least 30 percent of ever married women ages 15-49 are married to their first cousin.[xxxiii] As with other observed marriage patterns, research is needed to understand the sexual and reproductive

health implications of this phenomenon. While consanguineous marriage is known to be a risk factor for children's health, some observers suggest that it may be protective of sexual and reproductive health problems such as domestic violence, given the likelihood of the relatives on both sides of the marriage intervening to mediate any conflicts.

A more recent and striking phenomenon is the growing cohort of young women who remain unmarried up until the 30-39 age group. In almost half of Arab countries, more than 40 percent of women aged 15 to 49 have never married and between 7 and 21 per cent of women in many Arab countries remain never-married by age 30 to 39.[xxxiv] However, the research base is extremely weak on this trend and its underlying reasons[xxxv] and little attention has been paid to the health and economic well being of unmarried women in the region.[xxxvi]

Early Marriage

Given the pressure prevailing in the region to initiate childbearing as soon as possible after marriage, early marriage translates into early childbearing, which poses documented health risks to women and their babies. Early marriage and consequent early childbearing is less common in the region than in South Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa,[xxxvii] although there has been relatively little research in the region on the practice, despite its major implications for sexual and reproductive health. Early marriage is declining with the general trend towards increased age of marriage,[xxxviii] but there are still pockets of high prevalence of early marriage within all societies of the region. The median age at marriage is 17.5 in Oman, 19.5 in Saudi Arabia and 18.6 in the United Arab Emirates. It is estimated that across the region, about 1.6 million girls are married before the age of 20 and every year about 900,000 babies are born to teenage mothers.[xxxix] In Egypt, a nation-wide survey on adolescents aged 10 to 19 found a national prevalence of marriage of 11.7 percent among this age group.[xl] Given that marriage below the stipulated minimum age is illegal, however, there may be misreporting concerning this issue.

As Table 1 below shows, the legal minimum age at marriage for girls in the Arab countries is as low as 15 in Kuwait, the West Bank and Yemen, and 16 in Egypt. One of the few socio-cultural studies in the region of the reasons for early marriage,[xli] although based on fieldwork conducted in the early 1990s, found that in two villages of Upper Egypt, 44 percent of girls married before the legal marriage age of 16, 68 percent before the age of 18 and 81 percent before the age of 20. There the author found that: "It has been a common practice for a bride-to-be who is under-age (or her family) to declare that she has no birth certificate and present, instead, an age estimation by an accommodating physician."[xlii] She singled out girls' education as the most important factor in preventing early marriage.

While there are few reliable statistics from the region on links between early marriage and maternal risks, worldwide statistics suggest that these young brides are at very high risk. Early childbearing poses severe health risks to women in the form of maternal mortality, morbidity such as the problem of obstetric fistulae (known to be a problem in Yemen and Sudan particularly), and it jeopardizes opportunities for education and involvement in community life. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for 15-19 year old girls (married and unmarried) worldwide according to UNICEF. In another culturally conservative context, recent research in Pakistan has shown that women in low-income areas of Karachi who marry early are at higher risk of reproductive morbidity, including uterine prolapse and pelvic inflammatory disease.[xliii]

Table 1. LEGAL MINIMUM AGE FOR FEMALES TO MARRY IN ARAB COUNTRIES[1]							
Puberty	Age 9	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18	Age 20	Unlegislated
Sudan	Gaza	Kuwait West Bank Yemen	Egypt	Syria[2] Tunisia	Algeria Djibouti[3] Iraq[4] Jordan[5] Lebanon[6] Morocco	Libya	Bahrain Oman Qatar Saudi Arabia UAE

[1] All data, unless otherwise noted, has been retrieved from the Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace (WLP) website at http://www.learningpartnership.org/legislat/family_law.phtml with information compiled from the Emory Islamic Family Law Project, http://law.emory.edu/IFL/, Data accessed 29 April 2005

[2] In Syria women can be married at 13 with the permission of a judge.

[3] UNFPA report on Djibouti acknowledges that the latest Djibouti Family Code legislates the female age of marriage at 18, see http://www.un.org.dj/UNFPA/CP percent202003-2007 percent20DJIBOUTI.pdf, accessed on May 15, 2005

[4] Women can get married in Iraq at 15 with parental consent.

[5] A temporary law in Jordan raised the age of marriage for both girls and boys to 18; this remains a temporary law until it is passed and endorsed by parliament.

[6] Lebanon allows marriage at younger ages based on religious affiliation or sect. As described on the Emory Islamic Family Law project, "age of capacity is 18 years for males and 17 for females; scope for judicial discretion on basis of physical maturity and wali's permission from 17 years for males and 9 for females; real puberty or 15/9 with judicial permission for Shi'a; 18/17 or 16/15 with judicial permission for Druze", from http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/lebanon.htm, accessed May 15, 2005.

There have been few initiatives in the region addressing early marriage, and those that have been established are relatively small-scale. For example, the NGO Women's Affairs Centre in Gaza initiated a programme of research and intervention with parents and local mukhtars (community leaders), who certify that girls are at the minimum age of marriage, to educate them about the negative effects of early marriage. Similarly, a small-scale programme in Moqattam, Cairo among the families of zabaleen (garbage-collectors) has aimed to both raise the income-earning capacity of young girls and to help them to resist early marriage. The programme included rug-making, paper recycling and embroidery projects that provide an alternative to garbage sorting and enhance the skills and income of these girls. To encourage delayed and consensual marriage, a sum of 500 Egyptian pounds is offered to any girl who defers her marriage until age 18 and a Crisis Committee was established to counsel parents who attempt to have their daughters married under the age 18 against their will.[xliv]

An interesting trend in the Gulf countries to encourage men to marry compatriot women is the establishment of marriage funds which help pay dowries and provide housing. Such funds exist in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.[xlv]

The diversity of marriage patterns in the region has been given some research attention, but recent trends such as the resurgence of 'urfi (or customary marriage) in Egypt and other Arab countries have been scarcely studied and much more research is needed to explore the sexual and reproductive health implications for young people of forms of non-conventional marriage.

Customary ('Urfi) Marriage

Anecdotal and journalistic evidence has drawn attention to the resurgence of 'urfi (or customary) marriage in Egypt. Drawing on the Islamic requirements of only two witnesses and that the betrothal become public knowledge, this practice has evolved into one in which Egyptian youth are obtaining clandestine marriage certificates without announcing to their families their intentions to marry.[xlvi] Elsewhere, however, particularly in countries that do not have large urban populations, it has not been recorded. In Jordan, there have been recent media reports that it is practiced particularly among university students, and in Yemen it occurs very rarely and only if marriage to a non-Yemeni is involved.[xlvii] As in the case of temporary marriage in Iran, customary marriage represents a new response of young people to the economic and social impediments to conventional marriage. As Rashad and Osman state, it: "...may represent a coping strategy among youth as a compromise to the economic constraints to marriage and the cultural denial of extra-marital relations."[xlviii]

"Summer Marriages"

A phenomenon with significant repercussions for the sexual and reproductive health of young people is the documented but under-researched pattern whereby Arab tourists from elsewhere in the region become engaged to and marry young Egyptian girls over the summer in return for a significant bride-price. In many cases, these unions end in divorce at summer's end and thus, until 2005, any children borne have neither been entitled to Egyptian citizenship nor to the associated benefits of free government education and health-care.[xlix] Further research is needed both on the prevalence of this practice and whether it is taking place in other countries of the region, such as Morocco and Tunisia for example, which have significant tourist industries.[l]

Revisions of Marriage Legislation

A number of countries have introduced revisions to marriage legislation, although these have always been controversial and subject to intense public debate, and their sexual and reproductive health implications have not been researched. Most recently in Morocco, for example, the King authorised a substantial reform of the personal status code in 2003 which was adopted in 2004 after decades of lobbying by women's groups in that country; its provisions include raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 and making it easier for women to obtain a divorce.[li] Similarly in Jordan a temporary law issued by Royal Decree (but yet to be ratified by Parliament) has also raised the legal minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys to 18 (see Table 2 above). There is public discussion about a similar reform in Egypt. Generally speaking, most of the campaigns to revise marriage legislation have as their objectives: 1) making explicit women's right to divorce within Islam; 2) increasing awareness of the options women have in contracts; and 3) raising public debate and awareness about the significance of marriage contracts for women's rights and well-being.[lii]

5. The Reproductive Health Status of Young People: Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion

Lack of information about services, fear of side effects and social taboos all contribute to the barriers young people face in obtaining contraception in the Arab

region.[liii] Unmarried young people are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of services and risk stigma in using family planning, but equally those who marry early often lack knowledge and access to services such as for contraception. In Oman, less than one per cent of women are reported to use contraception before their first child, due to expectations they will give birth during the first year of marriage.[liv] In the five countries where DHS surveys have been conducted—Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Sudan and Jordan—ever-married women aged 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 have significantly lower rates of contraceptive use than all ever married women;[lv] in Yemen, only six per cent of ever-married women aged 15 to 19 and 15.6 percent of women aged 20 to 24 have ever used a modern method of contraception, compared to the figure of 37.7 percent for all ever-married women.[lvi]

Among the Arab countries, only Tunisia has legalised abortion on request; abortion is only legal to save a woman's life in Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, to preserve the physical health of the mother in Kuwait, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, and for reasons due to mental health of mother in Algeria, Iraq and Jordan.[lvii] A recent initiative to legalise abortion in Egypt has been overturned by the Shura Council, or Upper House of parliament. There are few community-based studies on the prevalence of self-induced abortion among young women. Among women admitted to hospital for complications of abortion in a nationally representative study in Egyptian public sector hospitals in 1996, the mean age was 27.4; 4.6 percent of post-abortion patients were 15-19 years old and 14.5 percent were 20-24.[lviii]

The Arab states account for only 3 percent of maternal deaths worldwide, most of which are concentrated in Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti, Morocco and Egypt.[lix] Few studies have looked at maternal deaths among younger cohorts. In Egypt, there has been a significant decline in the maternal mortality ratio from 174 to 100,000 live births in 1992-3 to 84 to 100,000 in 2000. The 2000 study found that 5 percent of maternal deaths were in the 15-19 age group and 19 percent in the 20-24 age groups, but notes that although younger women are at higher risk of a maternal death, fewer births occur to women in this age group.[lx]

National data is non-existent about the extent of reproductive morbidity in the region among women, and little is known about young women's morbidity. The Giza study among 508 low-income women in Egypt in 1993 raised awareness in the region and internationally of the heavy burden of mostly undiagnosed reproductive ill health, much of which was associated with higher parity. Nevertheless, the prevalence of reproductive tract infection was 45 percent among 14-19 year olds, and 55 percent among 20-24 year olds and the prevalence of genital prolepses was 24 percent for 14-19 year olds and 43 percent for 20-24 year olds. IUD use was a risk factor for gynaecological morbidity, due to inadequate screening for pre-existing infection.[lxi]

Given the sensitivity associated with research about sexual behaviour in the region, there is little known about the sexual behaviour of young people, particularly unmarried people, in stark contrast to other regions. The few studies of sexual behaviour in the region show wide variation. At the low end of the range, in Jordan, a 1994 study showed that 7 percent of college students admitted to non-marital sex, and in a national study among the general population ages 15 to 30 in 1999 4 percent did so.[lxii] In Egypt, in 1996 in a survey in four universities, 26 percent of young men and 3 percent of young women reported having sexual intercourse at least once.[lxiii]

Reporting of STIs in general is low in the region, and there are few studies on the incidence of sexually transmitted infections among youth. The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) received reports of a total of 73,000 STIs from 5 out of 23 countries for 2002, but note that this is no doubt under-reported.[lxiv] Available national data, however, does not break these figures into age groups. In Morocco, one study found that 40 percent of STIs recorded were among young people aged 15-29.[lxv]

HIV/AIDS in the Region among Young People

The Arab region is one where perhaps the least is known about the dynamics of the HIV/AIDS epidemic as compared to any other region. This is due to the inter-related problems of widespread public policy denial of the region's epidemic potential, public belief in the region's immunity from the global epidemic, and the sensitivities involved in conducting socio-behavioural research on sexual patterns. Although overall the region is currently classed as low prevalence, (at an estimated 0.3 adult prevalence rate or approximately 540,000 adults)[lxvi] there are pockets of worryingly high prevalence, and fast growth, particularly in Sudan, Djibouti and Libya. UNAIDS estimates that AIDS killed an estimated 28,000 people in 2004 in the region and it seems likely that the proportion of new infections in the 10 to 24 age group is around 50 percent, given worldwide patterns of transmission.[lxvii]

Although the region as a whole is considered low-prevalence, the dynamics of the epidemic vary considerably across countries. Some countries, particularly those in complex political emergencies, have generalized epidemics (e.g. Sudan and Djibouti). Others have epidemics mainly related to injecting drug use (e.g. Libya), affecting mostly young males. According to WHO, heterosexual transmission, however, remains the dominant mode of transmission. Based on reported cases made available to WHO EMRO, infections are higher among men than women in the region, and women tend to acquire HIV/AIDS at a younger age (25-29) than men (35-39).

The region is also closely integrated -- as well as sharing a common cultural and religious heritage — and national AIDS programme managers recognise the need to work regionally and inter-regionally on issues such as cross-border movements related to conflict, economic migration, sex tourism and trafficking, despite the many political and social sensitivities to addressing these concerns. In their 2004 report on the regional epidemic, UNAIDS notes that there is significant cross-border movement of people living with HIV/AIDS.[lxviii]

Despite the known vulnerability of young people internationally to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, there is strikingly little information on the HIV/AIDS related knowledge and behaviour of the group aged 10-24 years in the region. In some countries, however, there is some evidence that youth are highly at risk. In Djibouti, for example, the country with the highest AIDS prevalence in the region, among recorded AIDS cases, 3.8 percent are found among those 15 to 19 years old, and 43.6 percent among those 20-29 years old.[lxix]

Even though young people may have heard of HIV/AIDS, they do not always have specific knowledge regarding prevention methods, according to evidence from different countries of the region. They may also be lacking in awareness that healthy looking people can be HIV-positive. For example, in a nationally representative

survey of adolescents in Egypt, among 16 to 19 year-olds, 65.8 percent of girls and 76 percent of boys had heard about HIV/AIDS, but this knowledge was not matched by knowledge of condoms; only 5.1 percent of girls and 14.3 percent of boys reported knowledge of condoms. The authors of this survey, however, note that the association between condom use and illicit sexual relationships may lead to under-reporting on this question, particularly by girls.[lxx] Similarly in Sudan, UNFPA reports that only 12 percent of young women aged 15 to 24 are aware that consistent condom use prevents HIV/AIDS.[lxxi]

Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is practiced in only four countries, namely Egypt, Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti in this region. With the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of 1990, Sudan had the earliest nationally representative, population-based data on FGM,[lxxii] which found that over 89 percent of ever-married women aged 15-49 had had a severe form of FGM. In Egypt, the DHS of 2000 found that 97.3 percent of ever-married women aged 15-49, both Muslims and Copts (Christians), had FGM.[lxxiii] In Yemen, the practice is concentrated in the coastal areas with a national prevalence of 22.6 percent of ever-married women aged 15-49, according to the DHS of 1997.[lxxiv] While in Egypt and Yemen the practice is mainly carried out before puberty, in Yemen it is frequently performed on infants. In Djibouti, there have been no national population-based studies, but there is a reported diversity in both prevalence and severity across ethnic groups.[lxxv]

Violence against Women

NGOs and women's groups have led the public discussion on violence against women in the region, starting a network of counselling centres in the Maghreb countries, the West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan. Women's NGOs have also established centres to serve victims of violence (such as the Nadim Centre in Egypt), telephone hot-lines (such as that of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in The Occupied Palestinian Territories). These efforts have helped to document cases of violence, incest and sexual abuse against women, children and young people across the region. In some cases, the NGOs' advocacy has succeeded in encouraging governments to address the issue, such as in Morocco[lxxvi] but in most cases activities are only conducted through NGOs and are small-scale. So-called "honour" killings, the murder by relatives of girls and women who are deemed to have transgressed sexual mores, are known to occur across the region, although the research base is weak because of the sensitivity of the topic and under-reporting. The perpetrators are often brothers who see it as their responsibility to defend family honour, especially as it pertains to the social and sexual behaviour of their unmarried sisters. In Jordan, one of the most active states on this issue, a Family Protection Department has been established in the police force although an amendment to the penal code that would increase the sentence for perpetrators has twice been rejected.[lxxvii]

Few population-based studies are available to assess the prevalence of violence and official figures are constrained by under-reporting as well as debates over culturally acceptable definitions of violence. The absence of data makes it difficult to determine the frequency of violence against young people in the 10-24 age groups.

One of the few sources of nationally representative population-based data on

attitudes and incidence of violence against women is the Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey published in 1995. It found that 86 percent of ever married women reported agreeing that men are sometimes justified in beating their wives and agreement was somewhat higher among younger women aged 15 to 19 (at 92.3 percent). Among that age group, 69.9 percent said violence was justified if the wife refuses sex, 76.4 percent if the wife "answers back" and 64 percent if the wife talks to other men. In the 15-19 age group, 28.7 percent reported having been beaten at least once since marriage, mainly by a husband, while one-third of all women reported such beatings. Higher education was found to be a main protective factor against violence against women in this survey.

A critical need in this area is for more in-depth research investigating attitudes towards violence by both men and women, young and old. For example, two separate studies among Palestinian women (sample size of 550) and men (sample size of 600)[lxxviii] found that among women, slightly over half disapproved of violence against wives under any circumstances. However, 13 percent to 69 percent of the same women agreed that wife beating is justified under certain instances, particularly where the wife has been sexually unfaithful. The proportion of men who disapproved of violence in general was lower at 41 percent but 71 percent expressed some approval of violence against the wife when she has been unfaithful. Such studies reveal deep-seated contradictions in attitudes to violence which merit further research. Future research on this topic should employ qualitative as well as quantitative methods and highlight the need to understand culturally specific notions of violence and violations to bodily integrity. Once these notions are understood, surveys using culturally appropriate frameworks could assess prevalence and identify risk factors.

Young People's Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Health

The reluctance of governments in the region to address young people's reproductive health is in turn reflected in inadequate health services and a lack of information for married and unmarried young people alike. Across the region, young people report that they have insufficient access to information about their own development, including their sexual and reproductive health, whether from parents, teachers or health services. Parents often feel ill equipped to address the information needs of their sons and daughters, even though there is some evidence that they may be young people's preferred source of information.[lxxix] Health and life skills education curricula that include sexual and reproductive health topics are rare and where they do exist, relevant sections of the curriculum are frequently skipped over by teachers unprepared or embarrassed to teach them and are rarely assessed. [lxxx] Government health services create neither appropriate channels for addressing the special needs of this age group nor a climate in which young people, and particularly unmarried young people, are welcome. Private health services and pharmacies are often therefore the place of first recourse, although only for those who can afford them and are prepared to face the risk of stigma.

Both qualitative and population-based research in the region indicates that young people's knowledge about their own physiology and about sexuality and reproduction is highly limited. There is some comparative data (albeit from non-comparable age groups) from existing youth and development surveys cited above, for example, about young people's knowledge about puberty changes. It must be taken into account, however, that responses to questions on knowledge of sensitive

issues relating to puberty - and particularly puberty changes of the opposite sex - are likely to be subject to reporting bias. This said, however, as Table 2 below illustrates there is evidence that a significant proportion of young people in the region lack knowledge about puberty changes, particularly those changes experienced by the opposite sex. Data also confirm that young people have few legitimate sources of correct information about their own physiology, learning about puberty all on their own.

Table 2. Young People's Knowledge about Puberty Changes as Reported in Population-Based Surveys

Knowledge of Puberty Changes	**Country** *(Age Group)*				
	Egypt *(10-19)*	**Jordan** *(10-24)*	**The Occupied Palestinian Territories** *(12-19)*	**Syria** *(15-24)*	**Algeria** *(15-24)*
Percentage of females who do not know about puberty changes	30%	In femals 11.6% In males 17%	In femals 5.3% In males 10.3%	In femals 9.7%	N/A
Percentage of males who do not know about puberty changes	55%	In femals 24.6% In males 12.6%	In femals 28.9% In males 14.1%	In males 9.5%	N/A
Percentage of females self-taught about puberty changes	60%	N/A	N/A	59.3%	73.3%
Percentage of males self-taught about puberty changes	69%	N/A	N/A	76.8%	95%

Sources:
Tawila et al. 1999 (see FN 4)
Jordan National Youth Survey[lxxxi]
Palestinian Youth Survey 2003[lxxxii]
Arab League PAPFAM Youth Survey
Arab League PAPFAM Youth Survey

6. Research Gaps on Young People's Health

Clearly, there remain major knowledge gaps in almost all areas pertaining to the sexual and reproductive health of young people in the Arab countries. While epidemiological and medical research has been conducted on many reproductive health problems, this research has not always been complemented by interdisciplinary research combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, the perspectives of young people themselves on sexual and reproductive health problems are often lacking. Furthermore, evaluation data is weak in the region, thus limiting the knowledge base for new programmes or policies relating to sexual and reproductive health. Advocacy is needed with all parties involved - including donors - to initiate high quality programme evaluations, which are vital if programmes are to proceed from the pilot-level to achieving greater scale and impact.

Although a wealth of population-based data exists on health and population issues in the region, these have not been disaggregated sufficiently to analyze the situation of young people and very few have addressed unmarried young people. Moreover, comparative research is hampered by the lack of standardization of these sources across the region and by the varying political willingness to address such sensitive questions.

In addition to nationally sponsored and executed population-based surveys, demographic and health surveys have been regularly conducted in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen sponsored by USAID. Historically these have focused on demographic and family planning related questions, although in recent years their scope has broadened to include the reproductive health of married women. The Gulf States have implemented the Gulf Family Health Surveys.

In addition, the Arab League has supported PAPFAM Surveys in a number of countries with valuable population and health-related data. While these have followed the DHS in tending to sample only ever-married women, the Morocco survey included unmarried women. Of particular relevance, PAPFAM has developed a youth module that covers a range of issues pertaining to the health and welfare of youth, including their sexual and reproductive health.[lxxxiii] In the case of Tunisia and Algeria, the government permitted the asking of questions related to sexual behavior. However, this module and the questions therein are optional, limiting the potential for comparative analyses of this data across countries. Moreover, as countries have different needs in relation to the youth population, the age groups sampled vary (e.g. 18 to 28 years in Tunisia, 15 to 29 in Algeria while other countries have sampled the 15 to 24 age group). Nevertheless, this youth module presents an important opportunity to provide nationally representative population-based data on youth for the first time in the region.

Some countries in the region have also conducted nationally representative surveys of young people, such as the national survey conducted by the Population Council and partners in Egypt of adolescents aged 10 to 19. These surveys provide a valuable source of information on which to base policies addressing young people.

In some cases, access to data is limited due to a need to obtain government clearance. The degree to which existing research is accessible varies across the region. It is important to distinguish between countries where data is available but not accessible for largely political reasons and others countries where the relevant data has not been collected at all. If proper and comparative research is to be undertaken, greater

Clearly, there remain major knowledge gaps in almost all areas pertaining to the sexual and reproductive health of young people in the Arab countries.

advocacy is needed by all those with a stake in disseminating research (including researchers, NGOs and donors) to make collected data available.[lxxxiv]
Improved mechanisms for dissemination of existing research is needed both to share results across the region through translation into Arabic and French and to increase its availability internationally through more extensive publication in the international literature.

7. Looking Ahead

In most Arab countries, there is considerable untapped potential for reaching young people in fields or venues where they congregate in significant numbers, for example, in schools, in the military, in mosques or through religious leaders, and in social development or livelihoods programmes. Youth centres are a common intervention model, but they tend to reach a limited numbers of boys, since participants usually come mainly from the surrounding neighbourhood. Girls in the region tend to use these centres less frequently.

For young people with sexual and reproductive health concerns, public health providers in the region provide few services and do not cater specifically to the needs of youth. Where services are available, they may not always be conveniently located or staffed. Furthermore, there are significant cultural barriers to young women and men using them. Few government services are equipped to counsel and answer young people's questions pertaining to their sexual and reproductive health -- despite the known stigma and psychological suffering associated with sexual and reproductive health problems — and there is often little concern for confidentiality. In some cases, unmarried young people report being distrustful of public services, such as in Morocco[lxxxv] and in Syria where it has been reported that health service providers are sometimes hostile or judgmental.[lxxxvi]

Nevertheless, across the region, there have been some promising initiatives to address youth reproductive and sexual health,[lxxxvii] which need to be built upon, evaluated and where appropriate, replicated. Tunisia is an exception with its longstanding government commitment to young people's sexual and reproductive health. It has attempted to scale up programmes for youth to a national level through the introduction of adolescent health clinics, the provision of information to young people whether married or unmarried, and supporting peer education interventions in Tunisian universities on sexual and reproductive health topics among other initiatives. There have also been many efforts by women's groups and non-governmental organisations in this field. Generally, however, there also has not been sufficient opportunity to share lessons emerging from these programme models within the region.

Another Muslim, although non-Arab country, Iran, has initiated many programmes addressing the sexual and reproductive health of young people in an innovative manner consistent with the country's religious values that could be especially instructive for similar efforts in Arab countries. In particular, Iran's compulsory premarital counseling programme, which is linked to the issuing of marriage certificates, entails a mandatory counseling session for all couples intending to marry. These sessions address sensitive questions of sexual and reproductive health.[lxxxviii] Although some Arab countries have a similar programme, making such sessions mandatory would be culturally acceptable in this context. According to UNFPA, health authorities in Iran have also instructed health service personnel not

to inquire about the marital status of their patients, and since that decision contraceptive use has reportedly risen by 20 percent.[lxxxix]
In many contexts, developing separate "youth friendly" services may not be necessary, but health care personnel need greater training on the specific needs of young people and more resources need to be allocated to confidential and non-judgmental counselling for young people, whether married or unmarried. An example of a national-scale programme which has been effective in reaching large numbers of young people with sexual and reproductive health information was the initiation in the mid-1990s of an AIDS hot-line "Ask about AIDS" by the Ministry of Health and Population in Egypt. At its peak, this confidential counselling and information provision service, with trained male and female respondents, was receiving 1,000 callers a month, primarily young, unmarried people.[xc] Other hot-lines have been initiated by NGOs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, the Maghreb countries, Jordan and most recently Oman. Given the pervasive stigma associated with the provision of reproductive health information, a confidential and anonymous means of communication such as this one avoids face-to-face contact, and thus this programme model is culturally acceptable in the region.

Much more could be done in the region to intervene within educational contexts with programmes addressing sexual and reproductive health, but this often faces strong resistance. While there have been a number of initiatives to develop culturally appropriate sex education curricula, there is an urgent need for the training of teachers and for work both with educational authorities and parents to gain acceptability of such initiatives. Tunisia's effort to introduce peer education in university dormitories, stemming from its concern about the lack of information about reproductive health among young people and particularly young female migrants from rural areas, is exemplary in this respect and has proven to be effective.[xci] Interviewees across the region stressed the particular vulnerability of university students to sexual and reproductive health problems, and their lack of information. Even in a country which has been at the forefront of implementing reproductive health programmes in universities such as Tunisia, there still remains a widespread misinformation about sexual and reproductive health among university students.[xcii] Therefore, programmes in this area are particularly needed.

The following section outlines some key recommendations for policy, programmes and research that emanate from this review. They are not intended to be fully comprehensive, but represent the key areas where interventions could be undertaken immediately to improve the well-being of young people in the region, particularly in terms of their sexual and reproductive health.

8. Policy Recommendations

1. Increase investment in the health and development of young people:

Policies and programmes should address the different needs of married and unmarried young people holistically by strengthening protective factors, i.e. by integrating interventions to provide full access to health information and services, quality education and training for livelihoods, opportunities for civic participation, freedom from violence, and connections to supportive adults. Such initiatives are congruent with the current recommendations of human rights treaty bodies.

These integrated investments in young people's health and development should be

a central element in medium and long-term strategies to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Goal 1 - eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, Goal 2 - achieving universal primary education, Goal 3 - promoting gender equality, with the target of reducing gender inequalities in education, Goal 5 - improving maternal health, and Goal 6 -combating HIV/AIDS.

2. Review status of country's ratification of and reservations to major human rights treaties: CRC, CEDAW, CESCR and ICCPR for implications for young people's health and development.

3. Review existing civil and customary law from human rights and gender equity perspectives:

- Use the CEDAW and CRC country reporting documents to identify key human rights issues for young people.[xciii]
- Enforce minimum legal age at marriage for boys and girls, and mobilize support to establish a minimum of 18 years for both.
- Introduce measures to ban and eradicate FGM/C in the four countries where it is practiced.
- Reform laws on violence against girls and women as well as child sexual and physical abuse to provide better protection for victims.

4. Expand access to education, employment, and SRH services:

In accordance with Millennium Development Goals:
- Provide free education through the secondary school level and reduce all gender discrimination relating to education, with special attention to married and pregnant young girls (MDGs 2 and 3).
- Provide both HIV/AIDS prevention education and services, including access to condoms, and reproductive health education and services, including a full range of contraceptives and emergency contraception, to young people to prevent HIV/AIDS and STIs, RTIs, unwanted pregnancies, maternal mortality, infertility, and abortions (MDGs 5 and 6).

5. Strengthen resources and roles of youth ministries (or other pertinent ministry) to enhance multi-sectoral coordination and mechanisms for involving young people in policies and programmes.

6. Engage in advocacy to gain political and administrative support:

- Policy dialogue with and involvement of decision makers and gatekeepers
- Fill knowledge gaps to demonstrate need
- Evaluate pilot programmes, and when they demonstrate success, advocate for scale-up

7. Involve young people, parents, and community in needs assessments:

- Question-asking exercises are useful to break the silence, and demonstrate the information needs of young people.

Programme Recommendations

1. Think Comprehensively, Act Selectively: Each sector best reaches different populations of young people.

- Health: Married young women in clinics, and general youth population through
- community outreach programmes.
- Education: in-school, including late primary.
- Media: general youth population; radio reaches rural areas.
- Labour - employed youth, and those in vocational programmes.
- Police and judiciary - young people at risk, usually male and out of school, some in detention.
- Military - male 18-24, usually unmarried.
  NGOs & community organisations - out of school young people.

2. Youth-serving agencies are urged to give priority to:

- Young people in pockets of high poverty;
- Marginalised vulnerable groups (street children, CSWs, MSMs, IDUs, imprisoned, refugees).

3. Evaluate peer education programmes. Given the popularity of peer education programmes in the region, they should be evaluated as rigourously as other programmes with the following points in mind:

- Peers also need training in youth-friendly approaches.
- This model should only be implemented with adequate investment.
- Often there is a high rotation of volunteers who demand continuous training, supervision and incentives.
- It is unrealistic to assume that peer educators will continue without support and incentives. Sometimes young people do not prefer peers as information-givers or counsellors.

4. Evaluate the effectiveness of youth centres. These centres are also a popular model in the region, but there is evidence that girls and younger adolescents do not use them and that their coverage tends to be low in relation to their cost.

Research Recommendations

1. Encourage qualitative research on perceptions of young people (of services, social norms etc.) and service/programme preferences.

2. Encourage research on perceptions of adults about young people and their well-being (service providers, parents etc).

3. Encourage in-depth interdisciplinary research on youth development in the region.

4. Promote a better understanding of linkage between development/social trends and young people's well-being.

5. Improve the support for and independence of research on SRH issues through advocacy with political and religious leaders.

6. Build research skills and capacity in general and specifically in the field of evaluation.

7. Encourage greater reflexivity of researchers (appreciating impact of researcher on people being studied).

8. Encourage choice of research methodologies suitable to topic including qualitative and participatory methods.

9. Encourage and support translation into Arabic, Farsi, and French for dissemination in the region.

10. Strengthen capacity to publish existing and new research in internationally published literature.

11. Aim to make existing data relevant to policy-makers and service-providers.

Conclusion

While this paper is mainly based on a study of young people's sexual and reproductive health in the region, considerable information relevant to gender and the family also emerged. Patterns of discrimination against young women persist in education in a few countries, although in general, young women's educational attainment has taken a huge leap forward in the last two decades in Arab countries. However, restrictions on young women's mobility occur in many settings which affect their access to services and may discriminate against young women in access to other opportunities for recreation and employment. The fact that the region has the highest youth unemployment rate of any region exacerbates many of these social problems. Moreover, in the contexts of violence and disruption both of which the region has experienced disproportionately in comparison to elsewhere, lack of mobility and discrimination are heightened.

With regard to family issues and formation, the study revealed that while the traditional closeness of families in the region is a protective factor for young people, growing urbanization and loosening of social family ties combined with a widening generation gap is depriving many young people of the support that they need from adult family members. In addition, changing patterns of marriage and non-conventional forms of marriage demand urgent attention because of their potential implications for young people's health and because people in such marriages tend to lack legal, health and social protection. Early marriage is still an important violation of young women's rights in pockets of most countries; it most often occurs in rural areas, and in a few countries, such as Yemen and Sudan, is still widespread. Later age of marriage is the main trend in the region, however, and is mainly beneficial, reducing risks from early childbearing and opening educational opportunities for young women. However, this longer span of years between puberty and marriage poses risks when young people engage in sexual activity without sufficient information or access to protection.

Despite a cultural discourse that values the integrity of the family, and thus makes such sensitive issues that occur within families difficult to address, there is evidence that as elsewhere violence against women, including honour crimes, often does

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occur. This calls for firm policies and programmes based on support for women's human rights. Young women generally are the least powerful members of extended households, and thus are at high risk.

The evidence on the reproductive and sexual health of young people in the region is relatively weak compared to many other regions. Taboos against discussion of sexuality are a major impediment to further research on the topic. In other comparably conservative settings, such as India, for example, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has opened up possibilities for discussion and research on matters related to sexuality.[xciv] However, this is not the case in Arab countries, given the widespread misperception that HIV/AIDS is not yet a major problem.

Despite the many political and social constraints to addressing the universally sensitive and controversial issues entailed in promoting the reproductive and sexual health of young people, the Arab region shares many positive features that are protective of young people's health. Moreover, the Arab world has recently witnessed much greater openness on the part of decision-makers to address controversial issues such as sexual and reproductive health education, HIV/AIDS and FGM.

As noted above, if programmes take a positive youth development-oriented approach, in which the reproductive and sexual health needs of young people are framed within a wider perspective of their needs for education, recreation, and livelihoods, clear progress can be made. Culturally sensitive health and development programmes for young people can help them to realize their full potential as active citizens of their societies, unshackled by gender discrimination and the risks to their well-being that face them today.

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xii Department for International Development (UK), Regional Assistance Plan Middle East and North Africa, Consultation Draft, 2003.

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xiv Note, however, that Rashad and Osman (2003 p. 31) finds a decrease in the proportions of women setting up their own homes with their husband at marriage over time, which she suggests may be tied to the rising cost of housing. Rashad, H. and M. Osman, "Nuptiality in Arab Countries: Changes and implications" in N. Hopkins, ed., The New Arab Family, Cairo Papers in Social Science, Vol. 24, Nos. 1-2 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 20-50.

xv See, for example, Doan and Bisharat's 1990 study on the extended family residential unit in Amman, Jordan. Doan, R.M. and L. Bisharat "Female Autonomy and Child Nutritional Status: the Extended-family residential unit in Amman, Jordan," Social Science and Medicine 31(7) (1990): 783-789.

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xvii For example, Tandiar Samir, Centre for Development Services, July 2003; Shadia Wannous, Syria, July 2003.

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xix A point made by Robert Thompson, formerly WHO and UNFPA in the region, July 2003.

xx BBC programme "Egyptians Tackle Taboos Through the Net" Tuesday, 2 September, 2003, 09:22 GMT 10:22 UK, available on<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr//2/hi/technology/3199007.stm >

xxi BBC programme "Egyptians Tackle Taboos Through the Net" Tuesday, 2 September, 2003, 09:22 GMT 10:22 UK, available on<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr//2/hi/technology/3199007.stm >

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xxvii The latter topic has received little research attention. Exceptions are Foster (2002) on Tunisia and Cindoglu (in Ilkkaracan 2000) on Turkey. Foster, Angel, "Young Women's Sexuality in Tunisia: The Health Consequences of Misinformation among University Students" in D.L. Bowen and E.A. Early, eds., Everyday Life In The Muslim Middle East (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 98-110; Cindoglu, D., "Virginity Tests and Artificial Virginity in Modern Turkish Medicine,' in P. Ilkkaracan, ed., Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies (Turkey: Women for Women's Human Rights, New Ways, 2000), 215-228.

xxviii Fargues P. "Terminating marriage" in Hopkins N, ed., The New Arab Family, Cairo Papers in Social Science, Vol. 24, Nos. 1-2 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 247-273.

xxix Two exceptions are Singerman and Ibrahim 2003 and Amin and Al-Bassusi 2003. Singerman and Ibrahim, "The Costs of Marriage in Egypt†: A Hidden Dimension in the New Arab Demography" in Hopkins, N., ed., The New Arab Family, Cairo Papers in Social Science, Vol. 24, Nos. 1-2 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 80 - 116. Amin, Sajeda and N. Al-Bassusi, "Wage work

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and marriage: Perspectives of Egyptian Working Women," Policy Research Division Working Paper No. 171 (New York: Population Council, 2003).

[xxx]   Singerman and Ibrahim 2003.

[33]   Rashad and Osman 2003.

[xxxi] Rashad, Hoda, "Demographic Transition in Arab Countries: A New Perspective" Journal of Population Research 7(1) (2000): 83 - 101.

[xxxii] The figure for Sudan needs to take into account that most recent population-based surveys in Sudan have only been conducted in the northern part of the country because of the civil war in the South.

[xxxiii] Rashad and Osman 2003; their analysis covers only 13 countries of the region, however.

[xxxiv] Rashad 2000.

[xxxv] Rashad and Osman 2003.

[xxxvi] Rashad 2000.

[xxxvii] UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Early Marriage: Child Spouses. Innocenti Digest (7), March 2001. Available in a PDF file from: http://www.unicef-icdc.org/research/

[xxxviii]World Bank, Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa: Well-Being for All, Author: Atsuko Aoyama. Human Development Network, Health, Nutrition and Population Series, (Washington, D.C., 2001).

[xxxix] Ibid.

[xl]   El-Tawila et al. 1999.

[xli]   Hamamsy, L. El. Early marriage and Reproduction in Two Egyptian Villages, Occasional Paper. (Cairo: Population Council/UNFPA, 1994).

[xlii] Hamamsy, 1994: 8.

[xliii] Sajan, Fatima and Fariyal Fikree, "Does Early Age at Marriage Influence Gynecological Morbidities Among Pakistani Women?" Journal of Biosocial Science 34(3) (2002): 407-417.

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[xlvi] Hardee, Karen, Pamela Pine, and Lauren Taggart Wasson, Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health in the Asia and Near East Region, (Washington, DC: Policy Project, Futures Group, 2003). http://www.policyproject.com/pubs/generalreport/ARH_ANE.

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[xlviii]Rashad and Osman 2003: 39.

[xlix] In Egypt, until very recently it was not possible for a woman to convey citizenship to her child. This issue has been a main point for advocacy of the Arab feminist movement.

[l]   A television programme on the Al Jazeera channel of October 13, 2003 featured discussion of three forms of non-conventional marriage: temporary marriage, 'urfi marriage and jawaz al misyar, or business-related marriage that was reported to be practiced increasingly in the Gulf countries.

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[liv]   Al Riyami, A., M. Afifi, and R. Mabry, "Women's autonomy, education and employment in Oman and their influence on contraceptive use (Issues in Current Service Delivery)' Reproductive Health Matters 12(23) (2004):144 -155.

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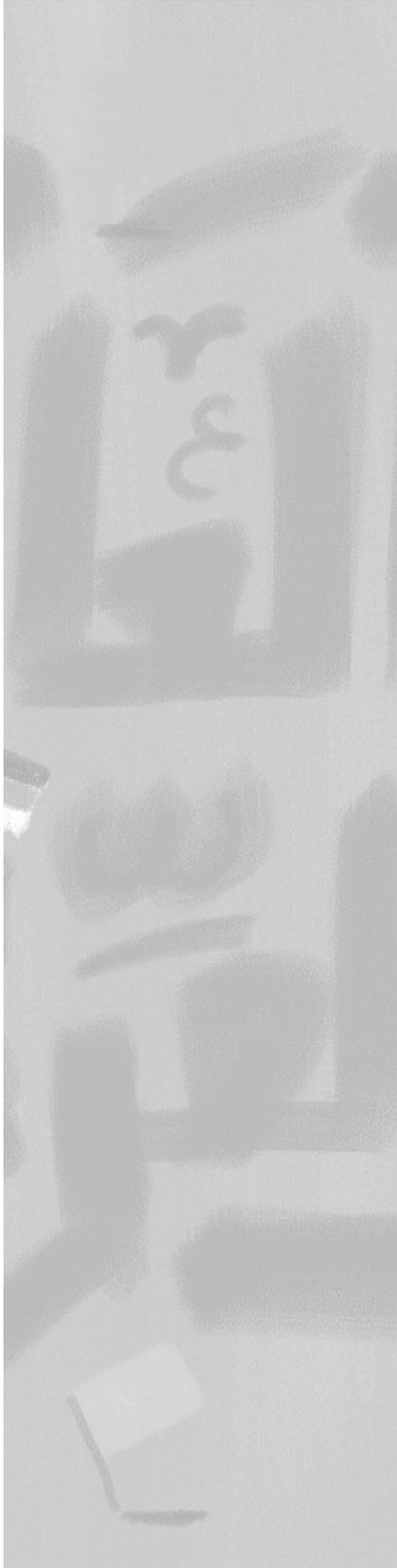
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lxv   World Bank/WHO/UNAIDS, Overview of the HIV/AIDS Situation in the Middle East and North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2002.

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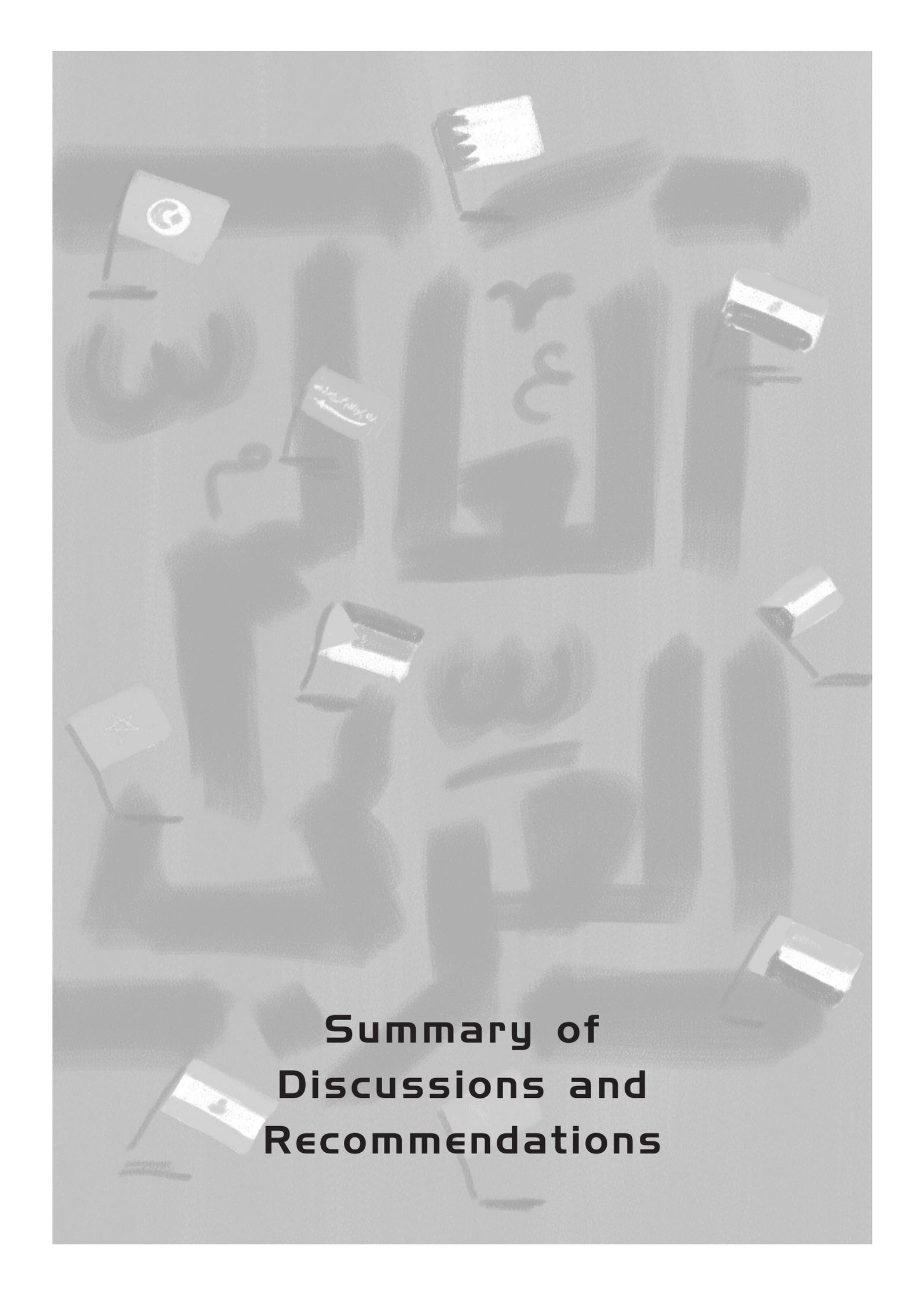
Summary of
Discussions and
Recommendations

Summary of Discussions and Recommendations

Gihan Abou-zeid

1. Youth and Globalisation

The workshops on youth and globalisation in three Arab capitals generated more questions than answers and they all paused at one question: what kind of youth are we talking about and who are they?

The responses were as diverse as the vantage points and affiliations of the attendees. However, they all agreed, after extensive discussion, on the United Nations definition of youth: ages 15 - 24. This period represents a time of change when one makes the transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Most often, this period is characterized by enthusiasm, dreams and ambitions, at the same time it is affected by doubts about youth held by society as a whole. While most Arab representatives agreed on the UN's definition of youth, there were still others from countries such as Bahrain and Jordan, which thought that this stage should be extended to age 30.

"Arab Youth" is a label that goes beyond simply defining an age group to discussing the reality and distinct upbringing unique to the Arab world. As discussed in the Arab Human Development Report of 2002, many factors influence this time of life such as the poor state of the economy in most of the region, and a weak education that leaves youth staggering with low levels of skills and knowledge.

In this regard, the workshops classified Arab youth into the following groups:
- Those who are far removed from both literacy and communication technology.
- Those who use communication technology only to perform certain tasks.
- Those who are aware of the importance of communication technology as a means for self-development and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.
- And finally the very few who are capable of developing technology itself.

The participants pointed out that in this age of Globalisation youth need to master communication technology otherwise they will lack a foundation to compete in the labour market and will not have fully developed their social skills. They also emphasized that Globalisation has led to a large influx of knowledge and information. As a result, youth-specific policies should enable them to seize the relevant opportunities.

Globalisation – One Term, Many Interpretations

Some participants held the opinion that globalisation has also been a gateway to sexual knowledge and the weakening of national and religious affiliation. They also perceived it as an effective means to heighten youth isolation and rebelliousness against family control. Indeed, they maintained that it has led to the adoption of Western beliefs and values, thus submerging the next generation in several new developments which leads to their isolation from their societies.

The discussions also drew distinctions between the effects of globalisation on different segments of the youth population. Youth in poor rural and urban areas do not know anything about Globalisation except the lure of its playful consumer face.

It further enhances their feelings of inadequacy given their modest education. On the other hand, globalisation has not created greater awareness of youth with special needs nor has it improved their quality of life. Despite new resources and investment, these youth remain sidelined.

In addition to the effects of Globalisation, the economic choices made by the developing Arab countries have contributed to the marginalization of youth in the labour market. Youth are most deeply affected by the problem of unemployment and they have a record of crime, violence and drug abuse. Globalisation continues to exercise pressure on Palestinian and Iraqi youth who live with the backdrop of war. These young people feel the contradictions in the world of today and wonder why they live under such terror. For some, the frustration associated with this question has inspired positive action. Those who have acquired the skills necessary to use communication have been able to express themselves and communicate their hardship to international organizations and the entire world.

Building a New Relationship

The participants agreed that the best way to deal with the hazards of Globalisation is to deepen the feeling of belonging and to promote the Arab identity through real mechanisms as opposed to the traditional means that have confined such expression to a number of songs, poems, and articles boasting of a rich heritage. Participants agreed on assessing other tools which would enhance Arab identity in these dangerous times. They found school curricula to be the first fundamental mechanism that enhances a young person's sense of belonging and reinforces it. The local media have repeatedly tried to promote this sense of belonging through continued emphasis on the glorious past believing that such a discourse influences the people.

The participants insisted on assigning to governments the responsibility of examining youth problems and analyzing their needs in a serious and systematic manner. They pointed out that policy makers should avoid assuming that they are fully aware of such problems and capable of understanding youth simply because they once belonged to the same age group.

The participants also insisted on assigning governments and relevant organizations, whether international or NGOs, the responsibility of helping youth regain their self-confidence. Typically youth suffer from a lack of confidence because the family, the school, the university and the media all assume the roles of advisors rather than of partners. Therefore, the mission of building self-confidence has to be undertaken by those who weakened it in the first place.

Some of the youth remarked that with a low level of confidence, they find no rationale for participation. They added that immigration, especially through clandestine routes that claim the lives of dozens on a daily basis in the waters and on the borders of different countries, is an attempt to escape the reality of societies which undervalue them.

On the other hand, from the perspective of Arab communities, youth violence is an acknowledgement of society's failure to engage youth in a constructive dialogue and to construct a suitable dialogue with them.

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The Road to 2015

The interventions of participants revealed that for youth to be successfully integrated into their societies, it is necessary for them to acquire the skills suited to the demands of the labour market and to have the tools to cope with some of the negative trends of Globalisation.

Participants also maintained that the empowerment of Arab youth necessitates the development of a strategy. However, the question was posed whether there should be one common strategy for all Arab youth. The participants advocated for one Arab strategy which reflects general principles based on the MDGs and on the respective needs countries have of their youth. They emphasized that youth should genuinely contribute to the development of this strategy, as they have in Jordan and Bahrain. They stressed the roles of civil society and the private sector therein. The participants also discussed the importance of developing national strategies, stemming from the general regional strategy and taking into consideration the specific context of each country. The interventions also stressed the importance of including a provision on citizenship rights, to promote a sense of belonging, which is not solely based on predominant religious, family and/or tribal affiliations.

The participants in the third Rabat workshop pointed out the importance of providing youth with the skills required for management of information technology. They referred to the ëArab Youth Portal', which is being implemented by ICTDAR (Information and Communication Technology for Development in the Arab region), a UNDP regional project, to familiarize youth with information technology and enable them to use it to expand their opportunities. The participants agreed that the divisions in the acquisition of knowledge reflect the line between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots, and between human satisfaction and frustration. While the workshops in Bahrain and Sana'a discussed the lack of data and information in the Arab world, the Rabat workshop addressed this problem by agreeing on the need for the construction of a unified data base on Arab youth. This data base would provide ample information about the challenges youth experience and serve as a major step towards the creation of a knowledge-based society conducive to enhancing human capital. Tunisia's successful experience in creating a national monitoring system for youth led the workshops to insist on the need of concerned departments and institutions and even international organizations to set up an Arab Youth observatory. There was a widespread agreement that establishing a regional youth observatory would provide a necessary mechanism for planning, developing, and monitoring youth strategies.
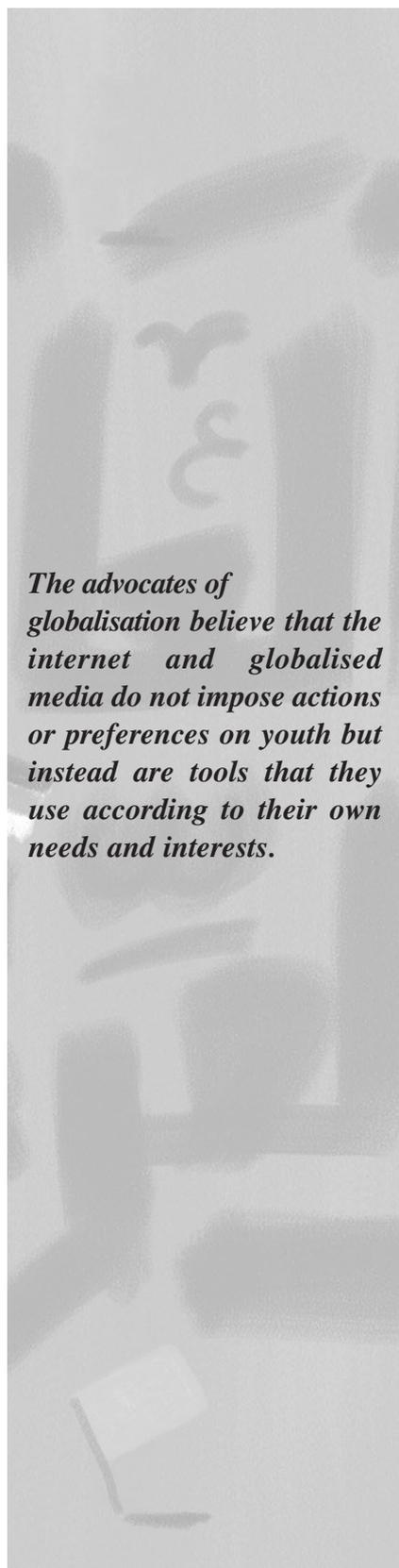
2. Media and Globalisation

The subject of media and Globalisation generated a heated debate among both advocates and detractors.

Some participants focused on the negative impact of globalised media on the principles and values of Arab youth and voiced their concern at the media's accountability for the decline of the morals of youth in general, especially relationships between males and females which explicitly disregard Arab cultural norms. In addition, they maintained that blind imitation and consumerism are supported and fed by provocative commercials. They expressed concerns about Western media—transmitted through satellite channels—and their capacity to demolish the basis of the traditional Arab family.
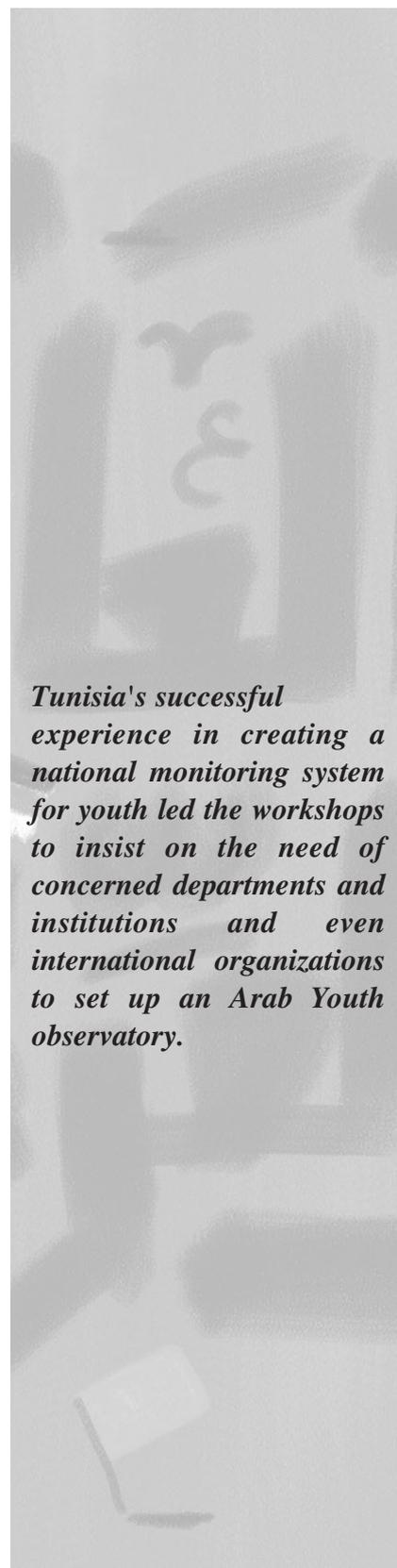
Tunisia's successful experience in creating a national monitoring system for youth led the workshops to insist on the need of concerned departments and institutions and even international organizations to set up an Arab Youth observatory.

The advocates of globalisation believe that the internet and globalised media do not impose actions or preferences on youth but instead are tools that they use according to their own needs and interests.

The participants also noted that current media information has fostered a detachment of youth from their everyday reality of limited opportunities. The information and images have caused some youth to retreat to a virtual life ruled by their imagination. Critics of globalised media emphasized that the materials transmitted through satellite channels do not only isolate youth from their societies but also deepen the divisions among youth from different segments of society. The critics cited the increase in the use of cellular phones among youth in rural, poor and marginalized areas as evidence of the expression of a false image or symbolic identity, as these youth truly do not have a need for these phones. Such aspirations are born through television images that portray lavishly luxurious lifestyles which are essentially unattainable.

Some, on the other hand, commented that satellites and communication technology had played a role in exposing Arab youth to different cultures stimulating them to learn from the experiences of other societies. Furthermore, the conflict and debate created by the global media produce a situation where youth have to arrive at their own formula to merge the original and incoming cultures. In this context, it is considered vital to recognize the role of electronic communication networks as forums for self-expression and as strong mechanisms for networking among peers.

The Egyptian 'Kefaya Movement' was hailed as a political movement that defies the status quo. At the beginning, it relied primarily on electronic communication networks in order to communicate with its members then started to disseminate its ideas and principles, and release information about the time and place of demonstrations through the internet and mobile text messages. This would have been impossible with earlier means of communication which were subject to heavier forms of surveillance. The advocates of globalisation believe that the internet and globalised media do not impose actions or preferences on youth but instead are tools that they use according to their own needs and interests. According to these advocates, the solution does not lie in shutting down satellite channels or in limiting the use of electronic networks, but rather in building generations capable of making full use of them in a manner that promotes the skills and knowledge of youth and of the entire society.

The same advocates emphasized that strong family relationships should be able to sustain themselves in spite of these challenges, and that it is imperative to illuminate the genuine root causes which affect family unity.

Both critics and proponents confessed that modern media strongly influences the lives of youth. They wondered why there were no programmes that worked to limit its impact on the Arab world. This led them to query the role of governments in caring for youth, and its direct intervention in limiting some negative impact.

The Distinction between Escape and Curfew

Throughout the three workshops, participants agreed that there is still "much apprehension and misunderstanding among Arab families" regarding the media.

Arab families tend to confine their children believing that they are protecting them from the dangers of the media and internet sites. Yet, many parents are unaware that this siege further ignites their curiosity and motivates the children to penetrate the forbidden. Participants commented that the reaction of Arab families ranges from complete prohibition of the use of computers and cellular phones to close monitoring

by the family. The different interventions rightly highlighted gender discrimination in the practice of control over the use of the internet and television channels: girls are not permitted access whereas boys are, simply by virtue of being male.

On the other hand, some Arab families adopt a different approach referred to as an "escape" by the participants. Families recognize their inability to control what is transmitted through TV channels thus discard the mediums of communication altogether. They resort to this believing that it will limit the demand for globalised media.

In between both approaches is a need for a middle ground where Arab families observe their children in a less intrusive manner and open channels of discussion with them about the material broadcast, so that youth can independently distinguish between the useful and the trivial.

Those that were less apprehensive stressed that the current stage was, by all accounts, likely to be a transitional one. Arab society should thus not overreact, as the initial dazzle will fade and Arab values and principles will settle into a less volatile relationship with exposure to new cultures.

3. *Youth and Employment*

Unemployment has fast become one of the main impediments to youth engagement in political life. It spreads a general feeling of frustration and drives youth to immerse themselves in the media and the internet. Furthermore, unemployment has been defined as one of the primary reasons behind the culture of violence among youth.

The problems associated with unemployment and labour markets appear in different guises in the Arab region. In the Gulf, where it was believed that unemployment was not a major issue, new evidence has proven otherwise. Participants from the Gulf emphasized that unemployment in their countries may be attributed to the presence of relatively cheap foreign labour which is granted few rights and protections; this supply of labour has not just occupied tens of thousands of jobs but also created a climate of discrimination between nationals and the foreign employees. However, tensions are rising with the increase in population and the political pressures to dismiss the foreign labour force and replace it with nationals. The situation requires a change in the mindset of future generations regarding the vocations and jobs they choose and/or refuse.

The participants described many experiences that underlined the diversity of the Gulf countries. Oman has sought to employ youth in different sectors and succeeded in overcoming several obstacles and employing youth in service professions through the "Sanad" project. Bahrain succeeded in countering much of the prevailing negative perception of service-oriented vocations. Nevertheless, the majority of jobs (about 60 percent) are still occupied by foreign labour. While the unemployment rate in Bahrain is 10.1 percent, it is 41 percent among youth, with the rate among young women double that among young men. Saudi Arabia has adopted a programme to lower unemployment among Saudi youth, which relies on the provision of loans to help them start small businesses. The United Arab Emirates has adopted a similar programme.

On the other hand, the Sana'a and Rabat workshops presented a relatively grimmer picture. Participants cited many reasons for the rise of youth unemployment rates and

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for their inability to enter the labour market. The main criticism focused on the education system in the region and its deficiencies in equipping youth with the skills necessary to either join the international labour market, or help themselves in the local ones. The discrimination and marginalization incorporated in the education institutions in Arab countries have created groups of youth incapable of defending their rights.

Participants highlighted the differences that characterize the labour markets of the Arab countries. High-tech sectors of the global market may give employees faith in the future and solid skills while local (and relatively closed) labour markets provide a different experience. The latter absorb youth graduating from Arab educational institutions and take them on a long journey of hard work with limited skills.

It is the marginal labour sector - the informal one- which absorbs the largest number of youth who are dropouts or have a limited education. The participants stressed that this market managed to attract youth despite all the underlying risks and lack of capacity to build real skills. In addition, it is an unstable market that does not provide the minimum levels of social support or health care, and weakens the youth sense of belonging as they conform to systems rife with fraud and manipulation.

Participants noted that the economic repercussions of Globalisation effectively promoted this informal sector after national production declined and multinational corporations multiplied. These changes have, in turn, created difficulties for the success of local goods and contributed to inflation, thereby increasing the flow of cheap low-quality goods produced with little control or accountability.

Markets Under Siege
Participants noted that although the region is still in need of technology and the capacity building necessary to master it, graduates of technical training institutions are still fewer in number, largely due to deficiencies in technical education and limited resources.

On the other hand, the political conditions in the region have affected the economic conditions of the Arab markets. Examples which illustrate this are the economic collapse of the Palestinian market, and the destruction of the Iraqi market, which had already suffered from a decade of economic sanctions, and now from an occupation.

For three-quarters of Palestinian and Iraqi youth, unemployment is the chief concern. The Palestinian labour market complements the Israeli market whereas the Iraqi labour market, on the other hand, can only absorb those who work to provide pressing daily services such as food, education, and health care. In both situations, there is much apprehension concerning death or injury on the way to work, the consistent threat of the loss of work, and overwhelming feelings of insecurity. These are all new factors that draw a painful picture of life in both countries.

Participants explained that the depletion of economic resources deprives youth of job opportunities. This phenomenon is most evident in Sudan where resources have been drained in order to buy weapons, essentially ignoring the development of the other sectors. Tens of thousands of Sudanese youth feel locked out of the labour market after long years of violent conflict, where they acquired the skills of war instead of acquiring skills that would help them contribute to building their country. The same situation applies to Lebanese youth who suffered from the civil war and were warriors and victims at the same time.

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Responses to Unemployment

The participants of the three workshops found some similarities among the tools used to fight unemployment by Arab governments, CSOs and international organizations working in the region. The concerned ministries agreed on credit programmes as a means to curb unemployment. They offered soft loans and established competent institutions to serve this purpose. In some countries, e.g. Tunisia, structured internships with training programmes aim to place youth in businesses for a paid period of 6 to 12 months.

However, participants criticized the response that reduced the solution of unemployment to the extension of loans or to training of youth in traditional industries. They pointed out that most youth lack a number of qualities necessary for these entrepreneurial activities, specifically the interpersonal and practical skills needed for marketing and selling goods and a strong proactive spirit and thus do not stand to benefit from these programmes. The major culprit for these deficiencies is the educational system that relies heavily on rote learning. Participants agreed that larger projects and labour-intensive industries are needed which could succeed in reducing unemployment rates by establishing mega projects and by employing graduates and paying them during their training.

To empower youth entering the labour market, UNDP's ICTDAR project proposed different mechanisms that focus on the acquisition of knowledge and the enhancement of human capital, the principal driving force of economic growth. ICTDAR aims to assist Arab countries in using information and communication technology to alleviate poverty through participation, capacity development and job creation campaigns. ICTDAR has carried out many initiatives in the Arab region including the "AJIALCOM" initiative which targets the leadership, management and knowledge-based skills of youth.

To that end, the initiative carried out a number of projects through creating youth employment centres equipped with computers and trainers. These centres initiate discussions with youth about issues such as drug abuse, AIDS, education and sex. They promote the concepts of citizenship and help youth become independent and active individuals capable of effective and responsible decision-making. These projects target youth between the ages of 12 and 25.

Moreover, ICTDAR came up with another initiative entitled "MASHROATI" that aims to support small and medium-size enterprises promote information and communication technology, improve business management and enhance productivity. The third initiative entitled "WRCATI" aims to enable women to have access to information through communication technology and through raising awareness of their legal and civil rights. The initiative looks at the stark rates of women's unemployment and their weak presence in the labour market, which may not only be attributed to current market conditions but also to their limited skills, lack of self-confidence and the absence of any legal support that would bolster their efforts in finding a job. With the experiences of some NGOs in mind, participants highlighted how capacity building could be achieved through the promotion of self-confidence and communication skills especially on and around small and medium enterprises.

In the same context, ICTDAR supports those with special needs who face poverty, isolation and all the problems of unemployment. For example it has programmes for
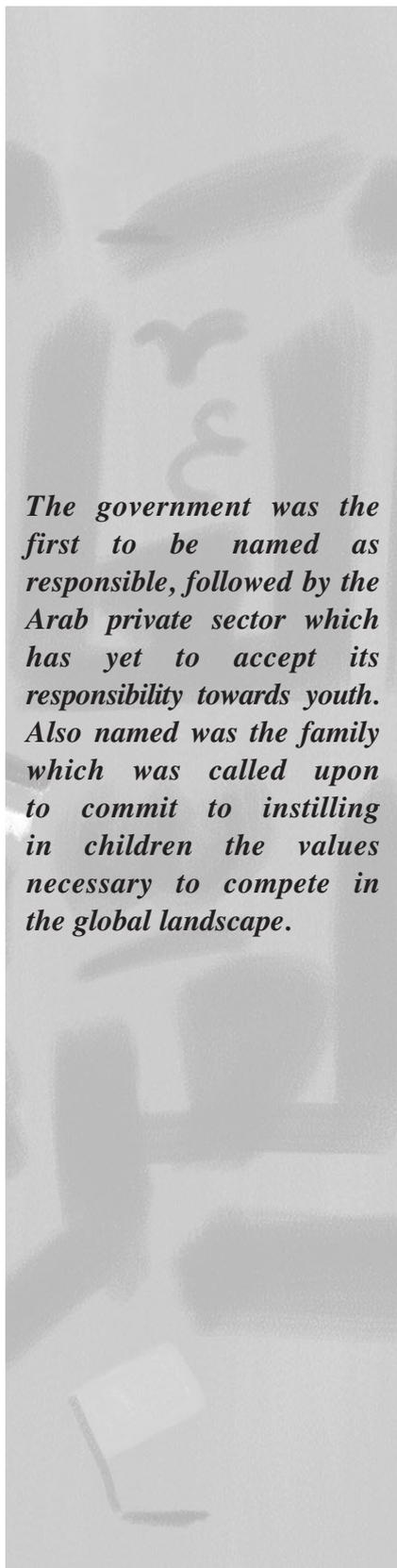
> *The government was the first to be named as responsible, followed by the Arab private sector which has yet to accept its responsibility towards youth. Also named was the family which was called upon to commit to instilling in children the values necessary to compete in the global landscape.*

the blind that give them the opportunity to enhance their skills through communication technology. This is a significant step towards fulfilling the rights of people with special needs who constitute more than 10 percent of the population in the Arab region.

The ICTDAR initiative "ICTARB" targets the apathy felt by certain segments in the Arab world, such as youth with special needs, delinquents in correctional facilities, those who have been incarcerated, youth who failed to successfully emigrate and returned crippled by frustration, and youth who have lost their identity for political reasons, such as the Bedouins. Forgotten or marginalized by national employment strategies, these youth encounter more serious difficulties than their peers in securing employment.

To Whom Should We Turn?

Who is responsible for eradicating unemployment? This question was central to the discussions of the participants in the three workshops.

The government was the first to be named as responsible, followed by the Arab private sector which has yet to accept its responsibility towards youth. Also named was the family which was called upon to commit to instilling in children the values necessary to compete in the global landscape. Youth are also to be held responsible as they are, at the same time, the key actors and beneficiaries. Many initiatives prove that youth can move from the position of recipient to that of active agent provided that they work hard to come out of the shell of unemployment and seek a job. Income-generation projects were not proposed as a mechanism to resolve unemployment whereas voluntary work was mentioned as a practical and effective way to help youth acquire professional skills and be psychologically and emotionally healthy.

The participants added that the idea of waiting for a job wastes time and can affect creativity and innovation. With the proliferation of voluntary activity centres (in Egypt 20,000 young volunteers work in 65 centres across the country); youth have proven to be proactive and have shown they want to work (Figures quoted by the participant from Egypt).

4. Youth and Governance

The discussions reflected confusion among youth regarding the meaning of the term "governance"; some defined it as an equivalent to democracy while others equated it to the level of political participation granted in a society. Some of the participants pointed out that governance might be a manifest in the effective role of civil society institutions and in the presence of tools to monitor the transparency, performance and efficiency of executive government bodies. Others held the opinion that governance is reflected in the work of elected representative bodies that work to serve the interests of the community.

The workshop on youth and governance revealed the desire of youth to have more political and societal influence in the Arab world. Their concerns varied from one country to another though they remain significant for everybody in the region. In Egypt, Jordan and Morocco youth are troubled by current political practices as the elite monopolize power while the institutions of elected representatives are fragile. In addition, the representation of youth has declined.

Sudanese youth are currently effected by internal strife. The number of casualties on all sides has grown, along with the fear of dividing the land and wasting its resources. In

another context, Lebanese youth are active in the call for transparency, democracy and reconciliation. Palestinian and Iraqi youth did not simply focus on their suffering under the burdens of occupation, but instead looked ahead through endeavours to create civil and political youth organizations, with the use of technology to communicate with each other, and with the world outside.

While considering the diverse experiences of the Gulf countries, the participants agreed on the vital need for more avenues for participation. The example of Kuwait is the most pertinent as women were granted (on May 16, 2005) - and have exercised - the right to vote and to run for political office. Youth in the Gulf also participate through civil society institutions. Sharjah boasts a very successful experience with a Shura (consultative) council for youth (made up of youth aged 13 to 20) as well as a Shura council for children (aged 9 to 12). Both councils aim to train youth to practice democracy according to the laws and principles of Shura, thereby enabling them to acquire basic communication and decision making skills. After a decade, it has become usual practice to hold periodic meetings where people in influential positions discuss youth-related policies.

Participants from Yemen shared a different framework for Yemeni youth. Yemen has political parties and civil society institutions in addition to NGOs. Youth were infuriated by the economic repercussions of privatization; these sentiments were reflected in youth demonstrations in the streets and at universities. While student movements, political parties and political resistance movements attract a great number of male youth, young women tend to work more closely with charity organizations due to relatively more restrictive conditions.

Egyptian youth, who attended the workshops, highlighted two mechanisms that have successfully influenced their participation in public life: (1) The International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 which inspired the establishment of a number of NGOs (including youth-driven ones), considered among the most active throughout Egypt; and (2) The experience of widespread youth centres.

The dialogue underscored that genuine youth participation stems from youth initiatives. Participants commented that the call for youth participation should entail community-wide acceptance and encouragement of space for their participation and overcoming the low expectations of them that can be prevalent.

Government representatives cited their efforts and programmes that strive to involve youth. They mentioned the example of the "Junior Parliament" project in Bahrain and the "Future Youth" project in Egypt and tens of other projects launched by the government either formally or informally, allowing international organizations-specifically the United Nations- to support them.

The participants in the Yemen workshop emphasized that a 'culture of fear' penetrating Arab societies was accountable for a generation's reluctance to participate. Participants in the Rabat Workshop agreed adding that the disregard for the concerns of youth further acts as an impediment to youth participation, and leads to their seclusion.

Furthermore, broader access to many forms of media has motivated youth and Arab societies at large to adopt new means of participation. In addition, internet networks have promoted youth participation and provided more chances for expression of opinion. Hundreds of youth magazines and websites have appeared reflecting the

awareness of youth about the political, economic and social problems of their society. Through these outlets, youth have proposed solutions to all serious crises affecting their region. This positive dimension of youth participation was commended, although some participants in the Sana'a workshop expressed concern that these mechanisms were only available for a limited number of youth who are trained to use modern technology and capable of acquiring equipment. They alluded to the statistics of the Arab Human Development Report of 2003 that showed that only 18 out of every 1000 Arabs use a computer. They pointed out that unless education in the Arab world helps all youth acquire these skills then Globalisation technology would turn into another tool that excludes the vulnerable segments in the society.

Girls and Governance

The participants in the three workshops discussed further impediments to female participation in the public and political arena, noting that the traditions that govern and restrict female movement are a fundamental hurdle. In Lebanon, this factor has been relatively mitigated against although it has been replaced by an entrenched stereotype of girls that solely emphasize their reproductive role. There was consensus among the male and female participants that female illiteracy is the paramount factor in limiting women's participation. Poverty also strongly influences female participation and keeps them outside the school gates.

Participants enumerated the different reasons that hamper female participation and noted that their impact varies among countries, societies, and groups of youth. In the Bedouin South of Libya for instance, women and girls have fewer rights and their only option is marriage; this is the same for female villagers in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the Sudan and Yemen.

In addition, Palestinian and Iraqi women are entrapped in an environment of insecurity with daily military operations and rampant violence that makes attaining an education difficult. The Iraqi participant added that the current Iraqi reality smothers both females and males and it is through sheer will-power that youth survive and overcome impediments.

Bringing Better Governance to Arab Countries

The participants of the three workshops discussed diverse mechanisms to enhance governance in Arab countries and youth participation in ruling institutions. Comments stressed the importance of youth representation in all elected councils as well as the laws that would guarantee this. Some of the discussants proposed quotas as a mechanism to ensure youth representation and participation in Arab parliaments and in elected councils in general.

Opinions varied between accepting and refusing to allocate seats for youth and women. Proponents believed an allotment of political seats would help train women and youth on effective political practice. Opponents believed that more deliberate integration and mainstreaming of youth and women in the political arena would be the most efficient means to build political capacity.

Another mechanism proposed was the activation of the role civil society institutions such that youth issues are prioritised. To facilitate this, various legal hurdles encountered by civil society need to be eliminated, and transparency

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within civil society institutions enforced.

The participants also highlighted the role of political parties in establishing effective governance. They pointed out that active political parties create a healthy environment, thus enabling a more inclusive participatory process from which youth stand to benefit.

Participants also noted the need to develop specific policies that inspire youth to form part of the governance process. Policies are an important mechanism of including or excluding people, and most youth policies in the region fall short of politically and socially mainstreaming youth in society at large.

5. *Youth and Gender Issues*

Participants discussed the impact of globalization on the lives of women stressing how economic changes in Arab countries affected women's work in the formal business sector, in manual work and in the informal labour force.

The discussions on the paper addressing employment and the labour market submitted by the International Labour Organization (ILO – Beirut office) emphasized that global economic expansion in Arab developing in particular (and in developing countries in general), has in fact increased the burden on poor and marginalized women. Women have been pushed to work in order to support the family in cheap labour-intensive industries. All of their diligent efforts, however, have not led to any appreciation of their economic contribution, nor to a redistribution of household chores and family responsibilities. On the contrary, discrimination in pay, training and promotion prevails. In the agricultural sector for instance, which employs a large share of women and is the most productive segment in the majority of agriculture-based Arab countries, women are paid only between 50 and 60 percent of what a man earns.

On the other hand, UNICEF (the office for the Middle East and North Africa Region) presented a panoramic view of the conditions of girls and women in the region. They provided an overview of a study conducted by Harvard University about youth sexual and reproductive health rights, which revealed a wide gender gap. According to the study, females are less likely to be educated and more prone to unemployment. They also receive less psychological and financial support due to the prevailing cultural norms that prioritize household work for women and girls. Females in the region are also more vulnerable to violence, being the prime victims of military and political violence, and among the first to suffer the impacts of armed conflict.

Some attributed this blatant discrimination against women to dominant cultural norms that emphasized women's reproductive roles, while overlooking the importance of girls' education and the quality thereof.

Others ascribed discrimination to gender-neutral policies, indicating that the concentration of education and health services in some areas at the expense of others entrenches further discrimination and marginalization.

Forms of Violence against Women

Participants concurred with the presentation by Oxfam on the underlying reasons for early marriage (girls who are below the age of 18), attributing this phenomenon to poverty, illiteracy, tradition, and belief in the need to shelter the youth, exacerbated by social pressure towards early marriage in the absence of

laws that determine a minimum age for marriage.

Participants added that early marriage did not always reflect the parents' optimal desire but was rather often a means to resolve economic problems and mitigate poverty. In certain cases, parents urge their daughters to marry wealthy men in return for money. The end result is often single mothers who endure a broad range of responsibilities ranging from raising children all on their own, to confronting psychological or physical illness including infectious chronic or fatal diseases, common among these women. Studies furthermore reveal an increase in divorce rates due to early marriage, in addition to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as abortion complications, which are as high as 80 percent among young women.

Research conducted by Oxfam reveals that 52.10 percent of girls in Yemen in contrast to 6.7 percent of men marry before the age of 18. It was also noted that early marriage rates over the span of three generations have increased among girls from 10.24 percent to 14.7 percent and among boys from 20.9 percent to 21.5 percent.

Participants noted that societies where religious values dominate witness high rates of early marriage among girls. In fact, religion is used as a pretext to legitimize early marriage regardless of the economic conditions of the family.

Honour crimes

On a different note, discussions condemned the type of violence associated with "honour crimes", which are common in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen. They agreed with the opinion that the murder of girls regardless of the reasons, constituted a criminal offence. In the case of honour crimes, the offender usually escaped penalty due to protection extended by society and sympathy even on the part of the law enforcement bodies.

Jordan's intervention related the experience of the Princess Basma Centre in convening workshops to discuss honour crimes. The importance of openly discussing the issue was emphasized in light of the grim Jordanian reality particularly among the male youth, who are pushed in most documented cases to become the means by which their sister's murder is completed. The workshops brought to light the complex reality behind honour crimes, adding further dimensions to common understandings of what the latter constitute. For instance, the workshops classified seclusion and the 'imprisonment' of girls, obstructing their limited chances for education, training and employment under the guise of 'protection', a form of crime against girls. Such crimes only serve to impede girls' psychological and social growth, smothering their aspirations for a different life.

Participants from Syria and Sudan noted that rape and sexual harassment are problems faced by women and girls across the world. However, it is the treatment of the victims of sexual harassment or rape that is the key factor that determines the difference between the plight of girls in the Arab region and those in more developed countries. The feeling of shame and remorse felt by victims in Arab countries culminates in their withdrawal from society, while at the level of the family or husband, the matter is hushed since public admission is akin to a scandal. Moreover, Arab laws that address these crimes fail to alleviate the harm endured by these women. Some laws even stipulate the release of the rapist if he agrees to marry his victim. The participants stressed that such laws should be comprehensively reviewed and redrafted in accordance with the principles of human rights and the international conventions signed by most Arab countries.

Participants denounced the way police stations in many Arab countries deal with the men who commit domestic violence, where policemen operate in solidarity with the accused men. The implicit agreement with the aggressor's act causes policemen to disregard or undermine the complaints of those women who resort to them seeking protection from domestic violence. This has led several human rights organizations advocating protection against violence to establish their own special units to receive complaints and treat female victims of violence.

In all three workshops, participants furthermore condemned another form of violence against girls, namely female genital mutilation (FGM). Discussions underscored the danger of FGM due to its deep-rooted presence in Arab culture, particularly in light of grave violations of the physical and psychological rights of girls that such a practice carries. Families are put in direct confrontation with prevailing norms and traditions, in the case that they refuse to undertake the practice of FGM. A family's ability to defy FGM ranges from complete submission to refusal, contingent upon the family's awareness where education levels no doubt play a significant role.

Consequently, the practice of FGM is more prevalent in areas where awareness and education levels are very low. It was however pointed out that the economic conditions of the family are not necessarily conducive factors in the prevention of this practice, In other words, better economic conditions can serve in reinforcing the practice, where privileged families differ merely in that they seek a doctor to perform FGM instead of non-physicians.

Some justified the family's desire to inflict FGM on their daughters due to a misperception that the practice provides protection. Others did not accept this explanation, arguing instead that parents are fully aware of the effect of FGM on the sexual life of any couple; nonetheless, their selfishness and subjugation to the societal pressures make them accept this practice.

AIDS: A Disease and a New Form of Violence

Participants shed light on the study conducted by Harvard University and presented in Cairo in May 2005 at the Arab League, which revealed the relatively weak and insufficient response of Arab governments and NGOs to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

They attributed this to society's denial of this reality. Many Arab countries have hotlines and special medical centres for HIV/AIDS patients that provide free testing. Yet, expansive media coverage is still absent, and the topic remains largely unpublicized and confined to scientific centres or NGOs.

All commended UNDP's role in breaking the silence that governs this issue. UNDP in the Arab States has organized through its regional programme a number of workshops with Muslim and Christian religious figures which culminated in the signing of the historic Cairo Declaration, where over 80 Muslim and Christian religious leaders representing the various faiths came together to emphasize the urgency of responding to HIV/AIDS, while concomitantly condemning all forms of discrimination, marginalization, and stigmatization of people living with the epidemic. "We emphasize the need to break the silence, doing so from the pulpits of our mosques, churches, educational institutions and all the venues in which we may be called to speak," states the Cairo Declaration. These efforts emphasize the role of religious men in promoting community awareness, especially for the benefit of youth.

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Participants stressed that the growing prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS should be attributed to the absence of sexual education in Arab society, in general, and among children and youth, in particular. Sexual education, as they perceived, was not a choice to be made by governments but an urgent measure needed to protect youth from the dangerous repercussions of its absence.

Participants also stressed that educational institutions have failed to incorporate sexual education in school curricula due to their inability to defend its application in all stages of education. In Syria, however, a private sector institution designed a site on the internet that aims to simplify sexual information and answer youth questions in serious scientific language.

Silence Is No Longer an Option

The workshops did not only monitor the conditions of girls in Arab societies but also proposed important suggestions to curb the aforementioned impediments to their empowerment. The first steps towards confronting these challenges have been taken to discredit the notion that the conduct of Arab youth and community is perfect. Participants also added that efforts should be continued to break the silence on all issues considered taboo through raising awareness, ongoing advocacy, and the mobilization of key constituencies – particularly the religious ones. The gathered youth emphasized that more attention should be directed to those subjected to violence, rape and AIDS, and the entire society mobilized in the extension of care therefore.

6. Recommendations

The three workshops emerged with many recommendations to empower and fulfil the needs of Arab youth against the backdrop of challenges, and based on the lessons learned so far from the youth ministries, NGOs and international partners.

Recommendations Regarding Youth and Globalisation:

● Establish a regional hub or Arab Youth Observatory to provide information, studies, and statistics about youth, as well as consistent evaluation and assessment of youth strategies and policies, and to activate practical employment generation opportunities. The observatory should work to facilitate:

i. Development of a unified and workable definition of Arab youth.

ii. Exchange of information and experiences regarding best practices of youth inclusion in data gathering and policy-making.

iii. Development of national surveys, databases and youth-specific indicators for the purpose of studying and researching the well-being of youth.

iv. Development of a regional network and/or the provision and mobilization of resources and support for youth together with partners in governments, NGOs and international multi-lateral agencies.

v. Develop programmes on youth employment generation and labour market trends regionally involving the private sector as well as CSOs.

Additional activities of the Observatory and other relevant youth organisations could include the following:

● Hold a meeting with Arab youth ministers to discuss and evaluate youth strategies

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or the general frameworks for youth in the countries that lack an integral strategy.

- Study the values that govern youth in all segments of Arab society.
- Ensure sustainability of the dialogue and meeting with Arab youth on a regular basis.
- Examine immigration of Arab youth to Western countries and efforts to maintain the immigrant's link with his/her homeland.
- Activate youth-related plans, propositions and agreements.
- Define the priorities of development in every Arab country, and take into consideration youth, gender and marginalized segments.
- Promote the awareness of youth and youth institutions in all sectors as part of the strategy to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- Determine the indicators to measure the implementation of the MDGs as far as youth are concerned.
- Train youth in the skills of conflict resolution and crisis management, especially youth that live under occupation or in places of conflict.
- Study how other countries that have experienced conflict have empowered youth under such conditions.
- Design a comprehensive strategy for the development of Arab youth and urge youth to participate in the formation of this strategy with special attention given to the role of underprivileged and marginalized groups and those living in conflict areas.
- Equip youth with basic life skills through educational and civil society institutions.
- Organize meetings with the concerned ministries in the region (youth, labour and education) in addition to civil society organizations. Designing a national mechanism to facilitate participation of governmental and non-governmental organizations which focus on youth.
- Raise the awareness of the MDGs and of the importance of the programmes developed to give momentum to countries to achieve those goals among youth governmental and non-governmental bodies.
- Encourage female and male youth to engage in voluntary activities with civil society organizations.
- Initiate institutional reform in the education sector so that youth are equipped with new skills.
- Conduct research and surveys on youth in the region in order to identify their needs and requirements on a regular basis.
- Publish the proceedings and results of the three workshops and circulate them among participants, youth organizations, and concerned ministries through the UNDP regional offices.

Recommendations Regarding Youth and the Media:

- Establish a dialogue between Arab political forces and the Arab media on youth issues with an aim of changing the stereotyped image of women in the media.
- Develop communication and information technology through government investment.
- Promote a role for youth in the Arab media to discuss their concerns and general societal problems.
- Bridge the digital gap between the current education reality and the requirements needed for interaction with advanced technology in the scientific, practical, public or private aspects of life.
- Empower Arab youth to use technology to enhance their abilities and elevate their economic and social well-being.
- Train the regional media to cover issues important to youth in Arabic and English.

- Discuss the results of the three workshops with relevant stakeholders in the Arab League, developing a mechanism to activate the League's role.
- Establish an electronic network to link Arab youth organizations.

Recommendations Regarding Youth and Gender:

- Incorporate sexual education as a basic subject at all levels of education and train teachers to teach it in a simple, convincing and objective manner.
- Reconsider the laws that discriminate against women and amend them so that they comply with international conventions and principles of human rights.
- Improve health services and make them available to youth in a manner that addresses their needs and personal development.
- Raise the awareness of youth and protect their right to access appropriate information and services on sexual and reproductive health.
- Implement the regional strategies related to HIV/AIDS and all other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Pressure governments to adopt a programme to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Bridge the gender gap in education and training and take into consideration the correlation between poverty and gender in the development of applicable legislation.
- Enhance the psychological health of youth and protect them from violence.
- Enact and enforce laws to prevent early marriage.
- Implement separate awareness programmes for girls.
- Monitor youth at risk, coordinating programmes with all concerned parties including civil society organizations, ministries and youth.
- Develop appropriate legislation that increases opportunities for women's participation.
- Create a legislative mechanism to combat violence that takes place at work, in the street, and also institutional and state violence.
- Enact a binding law that prevents marriage without a premarital medical exam.
- Enhance the role of human rights organizations to defy the stereotyped image of women broadcast in the media.
- Target men in creating awareness of the dangers of female genital mutilation (FGM).
- Observe international conventions in areas of war and conflict to prevent rape or aggression against women.
- Evaluate the programmes that combat violence against women.
- Provide health and education services in isolated and marginalized areas and enact laws that aim to keep girls in school.
- Train administrators of health programmes that target youth to better communicate with them in order to secure the provision of appropriate services.
- Pay special attention to the indicators related to the third MDG on gender equality to guide programmes that provide access to reproductive health services and prevent violence against women and children as well as early marriage.
- Enable women to acquire life skills, especially those women living in the Occupied
- Palestinian Territories, Iraq and southern Sudan.

Recommendations Regarding Youth and Governance:

- Adopt measures that facilitate some form of parliamentary representation of youth.
- Allocate a percentage of state budgets specifically for in the support of programmes for youth.

- Facilitate the coordination of activities among different youth institutions.
  Integrate youth in the implementation process of different initiatives and projects.
- Prepare and complete legislation and policy on youth work, amending existing legislation in order to activate youth roles.
- Encourage civil society organizations to coordinate more activities among themselves and collaborate with government.
- Encourage young men and women to engage in voluntary activities and to join civil society organizations.

Recommendations Regarding Youth and Unemployment:

- Harmonize educational institutions in Arab countries so they teach according to curricula relevant to marketable skills.
- Study the needs of the Arab labour markets to regularly assess what is required to best prepare youth for jobs.
- Explore the proposition of a common Arab market.
- Work on alleviating the poverty of women by equipping them with real skills that would secure strong access to the labour market.
- Prepare youth for the labour market by striking a balance between education, training and the requirements of the labour market.
- Develop a legislative framework that supports women's rights in the informal sector.

7. The Light at the End of the Tunnel

The workshops did not merely produce propositions that would help us meet the MDGs by 2015. Rather, they shed light on the brighter aspects of Arab society and in the lives of youth as well. It is these aspects that may play a pivotal role in the implementation of the MDGs.

The strengths of Arab society that will serve to support the next generation include:

- Solidarity within the family that protects youth from the dangers of the world and also serves to control drug abuse, crime, and contraction of HIV/AIDS among youth. Under normal circumstances, the family plays a major role in the economic and psychological support of youth at the beginning of their careers when they may lack experience, and assumes full responsibility until their children can stand on their feet.
- The strong religious traditions within Arab societies that contribute to protecting youth from multiple dangers, curbing the cross-borders blights and limiting the transmission of diseases.
- The social solidarity among fellow citizens, regardless of their religious, ethnic or economic identity, and its contribution to the mitigation of the consequences of conflicts and wars; this phenomenon was true in the cases of Lebanon and Algeria.
- Despite the current political conditions, there exists an awareness of the importance of common Arab action and synergy. The region has witnessed various modalities for cooperation and agreement in different political, cultural and economic arenas, as seen in the collaboration between the Maghreb countries and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The League of Arab States comprises all the countries in the region and so it remains an important institutional support that holds them together. Arabs are slowly moving towards the formation of regional Arab blocs, where a considerable achievement is

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seen in the formation of specialized Arab organizations, professional institutions, regional funds and professional unions. The workshops in turn, recorded a growing interest in establishing joint Arab projects in the coming years.

Increased cooperation and partnership will facilitate implementation of the MDGs and will support the development of markets so they absorb all Arab youth. The Gulf markets provide evidence of the strength of the youth labour force from all Arab countries; in fact, these markets have contributed to developing youth labour through their technological abilities and high professional performance.

There are important new variables in the region's development: the desire for change and acknowledgement of the importance of moving towards a new historic era of renaissance for Arabs. Evidence in every Arab country indicates awareness among youth of the significant changes occurring at the political, cultural and economic levels. During the three workshops, youth confirmed their awareness of these new variables and affirmed their capacity to usher in a new wave of positive and constructive change.