



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR 2002) addressed the most important development challenges facing the Arab world at the beginning of the third millennium. This second Report continues the process by examining in depth one of these challenges: the building of a knowledge society in Arab countries.

The AHDR series aims at building human development in the Arab world. As part of a continuing watch on human development in the region, this Report therefore opens by surveying some of the most salient trends and events at the global, regional and national levels that influenced the process of human development in the Arab world in 2002-2003. The remainder of the Report is a close study of one of the three cardinal challenges facing the region: its growing knowledge gap. It starts by outlining the conceptual basis of an Arab knowledge society and moves on to evaluate the status of the demand for, and the diffusion and production of knowledge in Arab countries at the beginning of the 21st century. It next analyses the cultural, economic, societal and political context influencing knowledge acquisition in the region at this critical junction in its history. The last section of this analysis culminates in a strategic vision that delineates the landmarks of a deep social reform process for establishing a knowledge-based society in the Arab countries.

## A Year of Loss, Re-examining Civil Liberties since September 11

“..over the last year the US government has taken a series of actions that have gradually eroded basic human rights protections in the United States, fundamental guarantees that have been central to the US constitutional system for more than two hundred years.”

(American) Lawyers for Human Rights.

## Mohammad Hassanein Heikal

The bell rung by the AHDR and heard by Arabs and other people the world over carried echoes of all the bells ringing through our lives. It was a call to knowledge and learning, an announcement of the last chance to join the trip to the future, an appeal for cleansing, an injunction to make way for an urgent priority, and finally a forewarning of imminent danger – urging us to hasten to douse the flames of a still-small fire waiting to engulf the region in a formidable blaze

## A ONE-YEAR OVERVIEW OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT:

### *TWO SETBACKS AND THE START OF REFORM*

A review of global and regional developments since the publication of AHDR 2002 underlines that the development challenges represented by the three deficits in knowledge, freedom and women’s empowerment remain serious. Those challenges may have become even graver in the area of freedoms, as a result of these developments.

## United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The late UN human rights chief, Sergio Vieira de Mello, emphasised that the ‘war on terror’ was exacerbating prejudices around the world, increasing discrimination against Arabs and damaging human rights in industrialised and developing countries.

Following the bloody events of September 11 and the loss of innocent lives in violation of all man-made and divine laws, a number of countries have adopted extreme security measures and policies as part of the “war on terrorism”. These measures and policies, however, exceeded their original goals and led to the erosion of civil and political liberties in many countries in the world, notably the United States, often diminishing the welfare of Arabs and Muslims living, studying or travelling abroad, interrupting cultural exchanges between the Arab world and the West and cut-

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ting off knowledge acquisition opportunities for young Arabs.

Among the first effects of these measures was the significant drop in the number of Arab students studying in the United States. Figures available from a number of Arab missions indicate that Arab student numbers in America dropped between 1999 and 2002 by an average of 30 per cent.

One of the worst consequences of freedom-constraining measures in developed countries is that they gave authorities in some Arab countries another excuse to enact new laws limiting civil and political freedoms. The Arab countries as a group adopted an expanded definition of terrorism, which assumed institutional expression at the regional level in “The Arab Charter against Terrorism”. This charter was criticised in Arab and international human rights circles, because its expanded definition opens the door to abuse. It allows censorship, restricts access to the Internet, and restricts printing and publication. Moreover, the Charter neither explicitly prohibits detention or torture, nor provides for questioning the legality of detentions. Furthermore, it does not protect personal freedom, since it does not require a prior judicial order authorising the wire-tapping of individuals or groups (Amnesty International).

Israel reoccupied Palestinian territories, inflicting horrifying human casualties and material destruction, thereby committing what one well-respected human rights organization called “war crimes” (Human Rights Watch, 2002). From September 2000 to April 2003, Israeli occupation forces killed 2,405 Palestinian citizens and injured 41,000 others. Most of those killed (85%) were civilians. A large proportion (20%) of them were children. UNICEF estimates that 7,000 children were injured and that 2,500 persons, of whom 500 were children, suffered permanent handicaps.

**Report of Human Rights Watch 2002,  
Jenin: IDF Operations**

“There is strong prima facie evidence that in some of the cases documented grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, or war crimes, were committed.”

A coalition led by the United States and Britain invaded and occupied Iraq, introducing a new challenge to the people of Iraq and the region. The only way to meet that challenge is to enable the Iraqi people to exercise their basic rights in accordance with international law, free themselves from occupation, recover their wealth, under a system of good governance representing the Iraqi people and take charge of rebuilding their country from a human development perspective.

In contrast to efforts to restructure the region from outside, the AHDR series aims to crystallise a strategic vision by Arab elites through a societal innovation process that envisages the restructuring of the region from within, and in service to Arab human development. Such reform from within, based on rigorous self-criticism, is a far more proper and sustainable alternative.

On the level of internal development in the Arab countries, progress was achieved in the advancement of women and in some aspects of popular participation. Women’s representation in some parliaments and in senior positions in Executive Authorities increased. A number of Arab countries witnessed parliamentary elections, some of them for the first time in decades. Yet these bright spots, accompanied briefly by dawning awareness of the need for reform, were partly eclipsed by new setbacks in the areas of freedom of opinion, expression and association.

Assessing the present state of regional cooperation, the Report finds that Arab integration continues to fall far behind in achieving what the first Arab Human Development Report called “An Arab Free Citizenship Zone”.

**BUILDING THE KNOWLEDGE  
SOCIETY IN ARAB COUNTRIES**

*THE STATUS OF KNOWLEDGE IN  
THE ARAB WORLD*

A knowledge-based society is one where knowledge diffusion, production and application become the organising principle in all aspects of human activity: culture, society, the economy, politics, and private life. Knowledge

nowadays can provide the means to expand the scope of human freedoms, enhance the capacity to guarantee those freedoms through good governance and achieve the higher moral human goals of justice and human dignity

Contrasting this type of society with the state of knowledge in Arab countries, the Report looks carefully at the characteristics of the two main components of the knowledge acquisition system: diffusion and production.

#### *KNOWLEDGE DIFFUSION: BLOCKS IN EDUCATION, BRIGHT SPOTS IN THE MEDIA*

Key knowledge dissemination processes in Arab countries, (socialisation and upbringing, education, the media and translation), face deep-seated social, institutional, economic and political impediments. Notable among these are the meagre resources available to individuals, families and institutions and the restrictions imposed upon them. As a result, these processes often falter and fall short of preparing the epistemological and societal environment necessary for knowledge production.

Studies indicate that the most widespread style of child rearing in Arab families is the authoritarian mode accompanied by the over-protective. This reduces children's independence, self-confidence and social efficiency, and fosters passive attitudes and hesitant decision-making skills. Most of all, it affects how the child thinks by suppressing questioning, exploration and initiative.

Impressive gains in the quantitative expansion of education in Arab countries in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are still modest in comparison with other developing countries or with the requirements of human development. High rates of illiteracy among women persist, particularly in some of the less developed Arab countries. Many children still do not have access to basic education. Higher education is characterized by decreasing enrolment, and public spending on education has actually declined since 1985.

In all cases, nevertheless, the most important challenge facing Arab education is its declining quality.

The mass media are the most important agents for the public diffusion of knowledge

yet Arab countries have lower information media to population ratios (number of newspapers, radio and televisions per 1000 people) compared to the world average. There are less than 53 newspapers per 1000 Arab citizens, compared to 285 papers per 1000 people in developed countries.

In most Arab countries, the media operate in an environment that sharply restricts freedom of the press and freedom of expression and opinion. Journalists face illegal harassment, intimidation and even physical threats, censorship is rife and newspapers and television channels are sometimes arbitrarily closed down. Most media institutions are state-owned, particularly radio and television.

The last two years, however, have seen some improvements in the Arab information environment, brought about by dawning competition. More independent-minded newspapers have appeared, challenging the iron grip of the older, state-supported press on political opinion, news and information. With bases abroad, these papers can escape state censorship. Some private satellite channels have started to contest the monopoly of state channels over the broadcast media. The most important characteristic of this new information movement is that it broadcasts in Arabic, thereby addressing the largest segment of the Arab audience.

In terms of infrastructure, the newer information channels benefit from the considerable groundwork that a number of Arab countries have laid. However, the general trend gravitates towards the lowest indicators in world standards. The number of telephone lines in the Arab countries is barely one fifth of that in developed countries. Access to digital media is also among the lowest in the world. There are just 18 computers per 1000 people in the region, compared to the global average of 78.3 percent per 1000 persons and only 1.6 per cent of the population has Internet access. These indicators scarcely reflect a sufficient level of preparedness for applying information technology for knowledge diffusion.

Translation is one of the important channels for the dissemination of information and communication with the rest of the world. The translation movement in the Arab world, however, remains static and chaotic. On average,

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*The region's corps of qualified knowledge workers is relatively small.*

only 4.4 translated books per million people were published in the first five years of the 1980s (less than one book per million people per year), while the corresponding rate in Hungary was 519 books per one million people and in Spain 920 books.

**KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION:  
MEAGRE OUTPUT, GLIMMERS OF  
CREATIVITY**

Turning knowledge assets into knowledge capital requires the production of new knowledge in all areas: in the physical and social sciences, arts, humanities and all other forms of social activity.

Data in the Report tell a story of stagnation in certain areas of knowledge production, especially in the field of scientific research. In addition to thin production, scientific research in Arab countries is held back by weak basic research and the almost total absence of advanced research in fields such as information technology and molecular biology. It also suffers from miserly R&D expenditure (currently state spending on R&D does not exceed 0.2 percent of GNP, most of which pays only for salaries), poor institutional support and a political and social context inimical to the development and promotion of science. The region's corps of qualified knowledge workers is relatively small. The number of scientists and engineers working in R&D in Arab countries is not more than 371 per million citizens. This is much lower than the global rate of 979 per million. The number of students enrolling in scientific disciplines in higher education in all Arab countries is also generally low, in comparison to countries that have used knowledge to take off, such as Korea, although among Arab countries, Jordan, followed by Algeria have distinguished themselves in this field.

In contrast to their weak production in science and technology, and beleaguered output in the humanities, Arab societies can boast a wealth of distinguished literary and artistic work that stands up to the highest standards of evaluation. One reason is that while science and technology require substantial social and economic investment, Arab artists can, and usually do, produce high-quality work without

significant institutional or material support. Innovation in literature and art works under different conditions from those that foster creativity in research and development. An Arab scientist would be highly unlikely to win a Nobel Prize in physics without societal and institutional support whereas an Arab novelist might achieve that distinction in literature in the absence of such support. There does not seem to be a conditional correlation between literary creativity and affluence, although financial independence can strengthen an author's intellectual freedom. Difficult conditions may sometimes provide incentives and intellectual and political stimuli for creative literature. Yet while artistic creativity itself defies societal restrictions, the absence of freedoms blocks public access to books and other forms of artistic expression.

**The Knowledge Block: Censorship**

The author and the publisher are forced to submit to the moods and instructions of 22 Arab censors and this prevents a book from moving freely and easily between its natural markets.

Fathi Khalil el-Biss,  
Vice President of the Arab Publishers Union

Literary production faces other major challenges. These include the small number of readers owing to high rates of illiteracy in some Arab countries and the weak purchasing power of the Arab reader. This limited readership is clearly reflected in the number of books published in the Arab world, which does not exceed 1.1% of world production, although Arabs constitute 5% of the world population. The production of literary and artistic books in Arab countries is lower than the general level. In 1996 it did not exceed 1,945 books, representing only 0.8% of world production, i.e., less than the production of a country such as Turkey, with a population one quarter of that of Arab countries. An abundance of religious books and a relative paucity of books in other fields characterize the Arab book market. Religious books account for 17% of the total number of books published in Arab countries, compared to 5% of the total number of books produced in other parts of the world.

The Report's analysis of the status of knowledge in Arab countries indicates the

*The number of books published in the Arab world does not exceed 1.1% of world production.*

presence of significant human capital that finds refuge in creativity from a restrictive societal and political environment and that could, under favourable circumstances, provide a solid structural foundation for a knowledge renaissance.

### CUMULATIVE KNOWLEDGE OUTCOMES: ENDS AND MEANS

The Report Team polled a sample of Arab university faculty members about knowledge acquisition in the region. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction in general with the status of knowledge acquisition in their countries (the average degree of satisfaction was 38%). Their satisfaction with the extent to which Arab knowledge serves human development was slightly less (the average rating was 35%). The survey confirmed that incentives for knowledge acquisition in Arab countries need to be much stronger, while freedom to acquire knowledge is subject to many constraints.

Rating the various aspects of the knowledge system, respondents argued that the lack of a reasonable measure of freedom in radio and television (30%) was one of the largest disincentives to knowledge acquisition. The same assessment applied to research and development in the public sector although, in the view of respondents, the latter area enjoys a higher level of freedom, thus suggesting that its problems have more to do with matters of organisation and financing.

In order to compare the knowledge capital of Arab countries with that of other countries, the Report explores a new composite index constructed from 10 indicators relating to different dimensions of knowledge capital. This attempt at measurement faced several limitations in data and methodology yet indicated that the Arab countries are far behind the leading developing countries, let alone the advanced industrialised countries, in the quality and quantity of their knowledge capital.

Struck by inconsistent or counterintuitive results from applying this index, the Report Team also considered seven cumulative knowledge outcomes or end results (such as exports with a high technological content and other outcomes), and their relationship to other knowledge indicators. The analysis

showed no correlation between the two groups.

The analysis concludes that the key challenge facing Arab countries does not consist only of catching up with other countries in terms of knowledge indicators; rather, it goes beyond that to include working hard to achieve similar knowledge outcomes by developing solid institutional structures and by crystallising the requisite political will, supported by sufficient resources, especially at the pan-Arab level.

### IMPORTED TECHNOLOGY: CONSUMPTION VERSUS ADOPTION

Arab countries' experiments with the transfer and adoption of technology have neither achieved the desired technological advancement nor yielded attractive returns on investments. Importing technology has not led to its adoption and internalisation in the host country, let alone to its diffusion and production.

The two biggest gaps accounting for this failure have been the absence of effective innovation and knowledge production systems in Arab countries, and the lack of rational policies that ingrain those essential values and institutional frameworks that support a knowledge society. These problems have been aggravated by the mistaken belief that a knowledge society can be built through the importation of scientific products without investing in the local production of knowledge, and through depending on cooperation with universities and research centres in advanced countries for training Arab scientific cadres without creating the local scientific traditions conducive to knowledge acquisition in the region.

The lack of national innovation systems in Arab countries represented, in effect, a waste of investment in industrial infrastructure and

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#### Ali Mustafa Musharrifah: On the Importance of the History of Science for the Advancement of Knowledge

“Civilised nations must have a culture associated with their history of scientific thought. ... Our scientific life in Egypt needs to catch up with our past in order to acquire the necessary strength, life and controls. We in Egypt transfer the

knowledge of others then leave it floating without any relationship to our past or any communication with our land. It is a foreign commodity that is strange in its looks, strange in its words and strange in its concepts.”

*Arab countries, with their aging technologies, are stuck at the wrong end of the technology ladder.*

fixed capital (buildings, factories, machinery and equipment). Such investments did not bring the wealth that Arab societies had sought through means other than the depletion of raw materials, nor expected social returns. Investment in the means of production does not lead to the real transfer and ownership of technology but rather to an increase in production capacity. Moreover, this is a time-bound gain, one that starts to erode as the acquired technology becomes obsolete. The products and services generated by imported technology become economically unfeasible and uncompetitive in local markets, while at the same time technology and production in the advanced countries are perpetually renewed by their own renovation and innovation systems. This does not take place in Arab countries which, with their aging technologies, are stuck at the wrong end of the technology ladder. They must keep purchasing new production capabilities as and when the technologies of the capabilities they own become outmoded.

*Religion urges people to seek knowledge.*

At the same time, Arab countries have not succeeded in becoming important poles of attraction for foreign direct investment (FDI). None of them figures among the top ten FDI-attracting countries in the developing world.

The transfer, embedding and production of knowledge that can generate new technologies require an organisational context that provides incentives for knowledge production. Such a context would consolidate linkages between R&D institutions and the production and service sectors and promote national capabilities for innovation.

#### Ahmad Kamal Aboulmajd

The eternity of Islam does not mean the “rigidity of its law”. It rather means the ability of this law to renew itself and make innovations in response to the movement of life and the changes of its forms. The originality and distinction of Muslims do not mean their isolation from the rest of mankind, inward-look-

ing in a closed circuit, surrounded by a wall without doors. They rather mean communication with people, living with them and – through that – providing them with the loftier values and grand principles, which are based on the Islamic doctrine, law and moral structure.

#### Milad Hanna: Harmony of Religions and Knowledge in the Arab World

This co-existence between Christianity and Islam in the Arab world presents a model of unity in diversity. It is one of

the reasons for progress, which has pushed humanity to advance through knowledge acquisition.

## THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT FOR KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION IN ARAB COUNTRIES

### PILLARS OF THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY: CULTURE

The knowledge system is influenced by societal, cultural, economic and political determinants. Among the most important of these determinants is culture in both of its aspects: the scholarly culture and the popular culture. Within Arabic culture, intellectual heritage constitutes an essential component. Language is the instrumental carrier of this culture and religion is the main and comprehensive belief system that guides its life. Moral, social and political values govern and direct action in the Arabic cultural system.

**Religion urges people to seek knowledge, despite some anti-development interpretations:** Undoubtedly, the relationship between religion and knowledge and its production is organically associated with concepts determined by the nature of religion and its overall position towards worldly life. Islamic religious texts uphold a balance between religion and worldly life, or between temporal life and the hereafter. The predominant tendency in Arab-Islamic civilization is a robust interest in worldly life and its sciences and in encouraging knowledge and sciences of various forms.

Developments in the contemporary Arab world and the national political, social and economic problems that appeared following the years of independence did, however, leave deep impacts on the intellectual, scholarly and cultural life of Arab countries. Religion - and its associated concepts and teleology - were among the basic aspects influenced by these developments. An alliance between some oppressive regimes and certain types of conservative religious scholars led to interpretations of Islam, which serve the government, but are inimical to human development, particularly with respect to freedom of thought, the interpretation of judgements, the accountability of regimes to the people and women’s participation in public life. Constraints on political action in many Arab countries pushed some

movements with an Islamic mark underground while causing others to don Islamic garb. Without peaceful and effective political channels for dealing with injustices in the Arab world, at the country, regional and global levels, some political movements identifying themselves as Islamic have resorted to restrictive interpretations and violence as means of political activism. They have fanned the embers of animosity towards both opposing political forces in Arab countries and “the others”, accusing them of being enemies of Islam itself. This has heightened the tempo of conflict and friction with society, the state and “the others”. This state of “opposition” to and “confrontation” with the West, in particular, reached its peak following the events of September 11, 2001. In this context, the Islamic religion itself was exposed to a harsh wave of libel, slander, provocation and criticism, which at times betrayed total ignorance and at other times, explicit fabrication.

Far from being opposed to knowledge, pure religion unquestionably urges people to seek knowledge and to establish knowledge societies. Perhaps the best evidence of that is the era when Arab science flowered and prospered, a time that was characterised by a strong synergy between religion, represented by Islam, on the one hand and science, on the other.

***The Arabic language: a heritage, a resource and a crisis:*** The role of language in a knowledge society is seminal, because language is an essential basis of culture and because culture is the key axis around which the process of development revolves. Language has a central position in the cultural system because of its association with a number of its components: intellect, creativity, education, information, heritage, values and beliefs. Today, at the gates of the knowledge society and the future, the Arabic language is, however, facing severe challenges and a real crisis in theorization, grammar, vocabulary, usage, documentation, creativity and criticism. To these aspects of the crisis, one must add the new challenges raised by information technologies, which relate to the computerised automation of the language.

The relation between the Arabic language and the transfer and absorption of technology

involves many issues. Chief among them are two central and closely inter-related matters, namely, the arabicisation of university education and the teaching of the Arabic language. The arabicisation of university education has become vital in order to enable young minds to develop firm critical and creative faculties in their own language and to assimilate the rising volume of scientific knowledge. In addition, failure to arabicise science creates obstacles to communication between different scientific disciplines and slows knowledge exchange. The authors underline that language is one of the cornerstones in the human development system while emphasising that arabicisation efforts should be accompanied by greater efforts to teach foreign languages to all.

The teaching of Arabic is also undergoing a severe crisis in terms of both methodology and curricula. The most apparent aspect of this crisis is the growing neglect of the functional aspects of (Arabic) language use. Arabic language skills in everyday life have deteriorated and Arabic language classes are often restricted to writing at the expense of reading. The situation of Arabic language teaching cannot be separated from that of classical Arabic in general, which has in effect ceased to be a spoken language. It is only the language of reading and writing; the formal language of intellectuals and academics, often used to display knowledge in lectures. Classical Arabic is not the language of cordial, spontaneous expression, emotions, daily encounters and ordinary communication. It is not a vehicle for discovering one’s inner self or outer surroundings.

The Report thus underlines that it has become necessary to work determinedly on strengthening the linguistic shields of Arabic and on sharpening its practical attributes, which emphasise its universal character and its ability to assimilate new informational and technological developments. This is in addition to consolidating its relationship with world languages and providing the necessary economic, social and technical conditions for enhancing the language and its creative products.

***Popular culture, between conformity and creativity:*** Communal and oral folk culture is a vast repository of experiences and cre-

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*Arab culture has no choice but to engage again in a new global experiment.*

ative efforts that have enriched, and continue to enrich, the intellectual, emotional and behavioural life of people in all societies. Folk culture is generally very rich in its constructions, encompassing knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and early industrial knowledge.

Arab folk culture shares all these qualities. Its particular feature is that it expresses two voices: one, a conformist voice, which urges adherence to familiar patterns, the other a creative voice, which questions received wisdom and urges the pursuit of knowledge. Arab popular culture is however not devoid of knowledge. Biographies, a common form of story telling, are often full of historical and geographical knowledge, as well as human insight. Romantic tales depicting imaginary ideal worlds express popular yearnings, dreams and ambitions. These and other forms of oral culture are recurrently recited at group evening gatherings and meetings, and are a means of sharing historical knowledge and rules related to customs. Many popular stories extol the value of information, showing it to be more valuable than wealth. The high respect commonly shown for a written text by folk communities indicates the value they accord to learning and knowledge.

**Cultural openness, from imitation to creative interaction:** Historically, Arab culture did not constitute a closed system, but rather displayed, at major historical junctures, a profound ability to open up, develop and transcend itself. It welcomed the experiences of other nations and incorporated them in its knowledge systems and way of life, regardless of the differences and variations that distinguished Arab societies from those nations and their experiences.

The first of the two major external influences which this culture embraced dates back to the age of scientific codification and the encounter with Greek civilization and sciences – indeed the demand for and importation of these sciences – in the third and fourth centuries A. H. (on the Islamic calendar) – 9th and 10th centuries A.D.

The second major experience came when the modern Arab world encountered Western civilization and opened up to science, literature and other aspects of Western culture at

the beginning of the 19th century. The outcome of this encounter was a renovation and modernization of the Arab cultural heritage, descending from the past, opening wide to the future and drawing abundantly on the sinews of modernization and the rich crop of Western production in all fields of knowledge, science, the arts, literature and technology.

Arabic culture, however, like other cultures, finds itself facing the challenges of an emerging global cultural homogeneity and related questions about cultural multiplicity, cultural personalities, the issue of the “self” and the “other”, and its own cultural character. These and similar questions raise apprehensions, fears and risks in the minds of its people. Concerns about the extinction of the language and culture and the diminution and dissipation of identity have become omnipresent in Arab thought and culture.

The truth is that Arab culture has no choice but to engage again in a new global experiment. It cannot enclose itself, contented with living on history, the past and inherited culture alone in a world whose victorious powers reach into all corners of the earth, dominating all forms of knowledge, behaviour, life, manufactured goods and innovation. Undoubtedly, some currents embedded in this culture would prefer a policy of withdrawal, of rejection and hostility to all values, ideas, and practices brought about by this global culture. This may appear justified in some ways, but a negative policy of “non-interaction” can only lead to the weakening and diminution of Arab cultural structures rather than their reinforcement and development.

Moreover, the global culture has its own dimensions of knowledge, science, and technology, which countries neglect at their own risk. Openness, interaction, assimilation, absorption, revision, criticism and examination cannot but stimulate creative knowledge production in Arab societies. This is already noticeable in many sectors of contemporary Arabic culture where various creative developments reveal the beneficial role played by global and human cultural interaction. This process continues to take place despite all local deterrents and external obstacles and notwithstanding the difficulties of national and international politics, where some powers



pursue total hegemony or choose the path of collision and conflict, rather than of understanding, dialogue, cooperation and alternation in power.

An analysis of the components of Arabic culture indicates that its essence, extending over three millennia, is capable of supporting the creation of a knowledge society in the third millennium as ably as it did towards the end of the first millennium and in the beginning of the second. Furthermore, the strength and richness of Arabic culture may reinforce the capacity of Arab societies to deal effectively with the torrential currents of globalisation.

#### *ECONOMIC STRUCTURE: FROM DEPLETING RESOURCES TO CREATING KNOWLEDGE*

One of the main features of the production pattern prevailing in Arab countries, which influences knowledge acquisition, is a high dependence on the depletion of raw materials, chiefly oil, and reliance on external rents. This rentier economic pattern entices societies to import expertise from outside because this is a quick and easy resort that however ends up weakening local demand for knowledge and forfeiting opportunities to produce it locally and employ it effectively in economic activity. A large part of Arab economic activity is concentrated on primary commodities, as in agriculture, which remains largely traditional, and in industries specializing in the production of consumer goods, which depend heavily on production licences obtained from foreign companies. At the same time, the share of the capital goods industry and of industries embodying higher technology continues to shrink. Demand for industrial products is negatively influenced by the small size of Arab markets, the weak competitiveness of Arab economies and the absence of transparency and accountability, which encourages overlap, and sometimes collusion, between political and business elites. Lack of competition reduces productivity and therefore demand for knowledge in economic activity. Instead, competitive advantage and the ability to maximize profits derive from favouritism in power structures, manifested in money and politics. Resistance to opening up to the outside world

by Arab economies and their lack of exposure to foreign competition, coupled with at times excessive protection for local products through import substitution policies, have also slowed the advancement of productivity and the employment of knowledge to that end.

Demand for knowledge has been weakened not only by faltering economic growth and productivity in Arab countries during the last quarter-century but also by the over-concentration of wealth in a few hands. Although some economies of the world have succeeded in the past in achieving economic growth while their income and wealth distribution patterns were skewed, this occurred in a different global context, characterized by a large number of closed economies throughout the world. The opening up of capital markets promoted by globalisation reduces the chances of local growth through concentration. The vast amount of Arab capital invested in industrialized countries and, therefore, denied to the Arab world, is strong evidence that, in human development terms, it is not the possession of money and wealth that matters but how productively such wealth is invested.

Recovery of economic growth in the Arab world and its main driver – increased productivity – are two prerequisites for the advancement of knowledge, but they are not enough. They will be enough only when decision-makers in Arab societies, the business sector, the civil society and the household sector put the goal of building the knowledge society at the head of their priorities and reflect that in all their decisions to spend and to invest.

#### *SOCIETAL INCENTIVES: POWER AND WEALTH WEAKEN THE ETHICS OF KNOWLEDGE*

Political, social and economic conditions play a decisive role in orienting systems of values and societal incentives. After independence, most Arab countries came under national political regimes that represented little advance on the autocratic style of ancient and more recent history. Social and individual freedoms were restricted in some areas and were totally absent in others, thus affecting the morals and practical values of people.

In Arab countries, the distribution of

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power, which sometimes coincided with the distribution of wealth, has had an effect on the morals of societies and individuals. The pursuit of personal gain, the preference for the private over the public good, social and moral corruption, the absence of honesty and accountability and many other illnesses, were all related in one way or another to a skewed distribution of power and the resulting social disparities. Justice, before all else, has been the victim of this state of affairs.

**Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi: The Character of Despotism.**

We have become accustomed to regarding abject submission as polite deference; obsequiousness as courtesy; sycophancy as oratory; bombast as substance; the acceptance of humiliation as modesty; the acceptance of injustice as obedience; and the pursuit of human entitlements as arrogance. Our inverted

system portrays the pursuit of the simplest knowledge as presumption; aspirations for the future as impossible dreams; courage as overreaching audacity; inspiration as folly; chivalry as aggression; free speech as insolence and free thinking as heresy.

The oil boom also played its role in eroding a number of values and societal incentives that would have been helpful in enhancing creativity and the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge. With the spread of negative values during that period, creative abilities were neglected, and knowledge lost its significance for human development. The social standing of scientists, educated people and intellectuals fell. Social value was measured by the criteria of money and fortune, regardless of how those fortunes were gained. Proprietorship and possession replaced knowledge and intellectualism. Perhaps worst of all, the values of independence, freedom and the importance of a critical mind were also buried.

Repression and marginalisation contributed to blunt the desire for achievement, happiness and commitment. As a result, indifference, political apathy and a sense of futility are becoming dangerously common among broad segments of the populace. Arab citizens are increasingly pushed away from effecting changes in their countries.

The Report calls on the state, civil society, cultural and mass media institutions, enlightened intellectuals and the public at large to plant those values that encourage action and innovation in the political, social and economic spheres. 'Reforming the mind' is indeed a significant requirement for Arab culture, yet 'reforming action' is equally urgent.

A centrifugal economic, social and political environment in the region, coupled with centripetal factors in other countries led to the growing phenomenon of an Arab brain drain. The emigration of qualified Arabs constitutes a form of reverse development aid since receiving countries evidently benefit from Arab investments in training and educating their citizens. More significant, however, is the opportunity cost of high levels of skilled outflows: the lost potential contribution of emigrants to knowledge and development in their countries of origin. This double loss calls for serious action to minimise its dangers: firstly by tapping the expertise and knowledge of the Arab Diaspora abroad, and secondly by providing Arab expatriates with incentives to return, either on temporary assignments or for good, to their countries of origin, carrying a human capital much larger than that they had migrated with. This can be achieved only by launching a serious project for human development that would attract highly qualified migrants back temporarily or permanently on productive and personally fulfilling assignments to serve their countries.

**The Arab Brain Drain**

Roughly 25% of 300,000 first degree graduates from Arab universities in 1995/96 emigrated. Between 1998 and 2000 more than 15,000 Arab doctors migrated.

Data provided by A.B. Zahlan.

Unlike the case of Arab culture, the analysis of Arab social and economic structures reveals ingrained obstacles to knowledge acquisition in the Arab world. Only by overcoming those obstacles through reform can a knowledge society be developed.

*THE POLITICAL CONTEXT:*

**Oppression, Knowledge and Development**

Political obstacles to knowledge acquisition, as the Report argues, are even more severe in Arab countries than those posed by their socio-economic structures, which are in turn seen to be more obstructive than any features of culture.

Political power plays a key role in directing knowledge and influencing its development. It

*The emigration of qualified Arabs constitutes a form of reverse development aid.*

fosters knowledge that is favourable to its goals and suppresses opposing patterns. Political instability and fierce struggles for access to political positions in the absence of an established rule for the peaceful rotation of power – in short, democracy – impede the growth of knowledge in Arab soil. One of the main results of that unstable political situation has been the subjection of scientific institutions to political strategies and power conflicts. In managing these institutions, political loyalties take precedence over efficiency and knowledge. Power shackles active minds, extinguishes the flame of learning and kills the drive for innovation.

The Report calls for the establishment of an independent knowledge sphere that produces and promotes knowledge free from political coercion. This is possible only by democratising political life and knowledge and ensuring that knowledge can be freely acquired and produced.

Laws are needed to guarantee Arab citizens the essential rights of knowledge - the freedom of thought and expression that are a precondition for knowledge to flourish. The international human rights conventions have been signed by most Arab states, but they have neither entered the legal culture nor been incorporated into substantive domestic legislation. Yet the problem of freedom in the Arab world is not related to the implementation of laws as much as to the violation of these laws. Oppression, the arbitrary application of laws, selective censorship and other politically motivated restrictions are widespread. They often take the form of legal constraints on publications, associations, general assemblies and electronic media, which prevent these from carrying out their communication and cultural roles. Such restrictions also obstruct the diffusion of knowledge and the education of public opinion.

Yet the more dangerous restrictions are those imposed by security authorities when they confiscate publications or ban people from entering a country or prevent the sale of certain books during fairs while promoting other kinds of books. In committing these acts, these authorities reach above the constitutional institutions and the law, citing the pretext of 'national security' or public order.

Other forms of restriction come from narrow-minded, self-appointed custodians of public morality, and from the censorship of books, articles and media events. Creativity, innovation and knowledge are the first victims of the suppression or denial of freedoms.

***A global context that poses a challenge:***

Globalisation in its current form and existing institutions is often weighted towards securing the interests of the rich and powerful nations and their dominance over the world economy, knowledge flows and, by extension, opportunities for development. Without changes that tip the balance of global governance more towards the needs and aspirations of developing countries, including Arab countries, globalisation cannot help these nations to achieve human progress.

“If we are not careful, the intellectual property rights system may introduce distortions that would be detrimental to the interests of developing countries.”

Commission on Intellectual Property Rights (London, Sept 2002).

Perhaps the most important example from a knowledge perspective is the insistence by industrialised countries, the main producers of knowledge at the global level, that knowledge should be converted from a public good to a private commodity through the instrument of intellectual property rights, which are largely owned by the industrialised West. This is now happening even in cases where the knowledge originated in developing countries and was later acquired by institutions in the industrialised world. This trend threatens to cut down developing country opportunities to acquire new knowledge and it especially jeopardises productive sectors such as medicine and pharmacology.

In the case of Arab countries in particular, a qualitative jump in the effectiveness of the knowledge acquisition system requires closer and more efficient forms of cooperation at the Pan-Arab level.

“It is quite clear that the dilemma of Arab development will not be solved without focusing fully on human development – the development of the citizen and his/her role in economic, social and political life.”

Mustafa Al-Barghouthi

*Power shackles active minds, extinguishes the flame of learning and kills the drive for innovation.*

*Without changes that tip the balance of global governance more towards the needs and aspirations of developing countries, including Arab countries, globalisation cannot help these nations achieve human progress.*

## A STRATEGIC VISION FOR ESTABLISHING A KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY IN THE ARAB WORLD

The Report pulls together the various threads of its analysis of the status of Arab knowledge in a concluding strategic vision of the Arab knowledge society, supported by five pillars:

1. ***Guaranteeing the key freedoms of opinion, speech and assembly through good governance bounded by the law:***

A climate of freedom is an essential prerequisite for the knowledge society. These freedoms are the thresholds to knowledge production, to creativity and innovation, and to invigorating scientific research, technical development and artistic and literary expression. Constitutions, laws and administrative procedures need to be refined to remove all restrictions on essential freedoms, particularly administrative censorship, and regulatory restrictions by security apparatuses on the production and diffusion of knowledge and all kinds of creative expression.

2. ***Disseminating high quality education for all:*** The detailed proposals for reform in education include: giving priority to early childhood learning; ensuring universal basic education for all and extending it to at least 10th grade; developing an adult education system for lifelong learning; improving the quality of education at all stages; giving particular attention to promoting higher education, and instituting independent periodic evaluations of quality at all stages of education.

3. ***Embedding and ingraining science, and building and broadening the capacity for research and development in all societal activities.*** This can be achieved through promoting basic research, and establishing a centrally coordinated regional creativity and innovation network that permeates the entire fabric of society and enjoys supportive and complementary linkages in the regional and international spheres.

4. ***Shifting rapidly towards knowledge-based production in Arab socioeconomic structures:*** This calls for a decisive move towards developing renewable resources through knowledge and technological capabilities and towards diversifying economic structures and markets. It also requires upgrading

the Arab presence in the 'new economy' and the consolidation of a societal incentives system that upholds the acquisition and application of knowledge for human development in contrast to the current mode in which values are centred on material possessions and in seeking access and favour from the two sources of power: money and authority.

5. ***Developing an authentic, broadminded and enlightened Arab knowledge model.***

This would entail:

- Delivering true religion from political exploitation and respecting critical scholarship. The components of this reform include returning to the civilised, moral and humanitarian vision of pure religion; restoring to religious institutions their independence from political authorities, governments, states and radical religious-political movements; recognising intellectual freedom; activating interpretative jurisprudence, preserving the right to differ in doctrines, religious schools and interpretations.

- Advancing the Arabic language by undertaking serious research and linguistic reform for translating scientific terms and coining simple linguistic usages. This also includes compiling specialised, functional dictionaries and other reference works that monitor common classical-colloquial words for use in children's programmes and written and audio publications. This must be matched by other persistent efforts to facilitate the acquisition of Arabic through formal and informal learning channels, and to produce creative and innovative writing for young children.

- Reclaiming some of the myriad bright spots in the Arab cultural heritage. These must be incorporated in the core of the Arab knowledge model in a manner far above and beyond the self-centred singing of one's own praises. This legacy must be assimilated and understood as part of the structure of motivation for developing and nurturing an Arab knowledge system in Arab minds and institutions.

- Enriching, promoting and celebrating cultural diversity within Arab countries. This calls for providing safeguards for the protection of all sub-cultures and for encouraging them to interact, intermingle, grow and flourish.

*Constitutions, laws and administrative procedures need to be refined to remove all restrictions on essential freedoms.*

- Opening up to other cultures. Such interaction would be strengthened by translation into other languages; promoting an intelligent and generous exchange with non-Arab cultures and civilisations; maximising benefits from regional and international organisations and initiating reform in the world order through stronger inter-Arab cooperation.

**Al-Kindy: Welcoming the truth regardless of its source**

“We should not shy away from welcoming and acquiring the truth regardless of where it came from, even if it came from distant races and nations that are different from us. Nothing is more important than seeking the truth except the truth itself. We should not belittle the truth, or those who utter it or bring it.”

*The pursuit of knowledge is prompted by religion, culture, history and the human will to succeed.*

As the Report affirms in closing, knowledge closely approaches a religious obligation that Arabs ought to honour and exercise. It points out the way on the Arab journey to a dignified and prosperous future. The pursuit of knowledge is prompted by religion, culture, history and the human will to succeed. Obstructions on the road are the work of mortals: the defective structures of the past and present – social, economic and, above all, political. Arabs must remove or reform these structures in order to take the place they deserve in the world of knowledge at the beginning of the knowledge millennium.