



API's 9th International Conference on "Women and Youth in Arab Development "

(Cairo, Egypt, 22-24 March 2010)

Background:

1 In the Kuwait Declaration (20 January 2009) the Arab Leaders enumerated the development challenges facing various Arab countries which included, among others, the following: (a) the "empowerment of women, and the enhancement of their economic, social and legal positions, and of their role in public life, with the objective of achieving gender equality and emphasizing the principle of equity in society"; and (b) "allocating the necessary resources for the empowerment of youth to enable them to play their role in effecting development and enhancing their participation in development initiatives".

2. The above expression of the challenges facing the Arab countries regarding an enhanced position and role for women and youth is consistent with the broad view of development as a process of expanding the freedoms that people enjoy. In this respect such concerns are also consistent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) formulated by the international community in 2000. The third MDG, it will be recalled, is to "promote gender equality and empower women". Such a goal reflects the importance that the international community places on the choices available for women in society, especially as relates to their role in effecting social change and the process of development in various countries..

3. The MDGs also accorded youth (15-24 year old) the importance they deserve. Such importance is reflected in the indicators used for measuring progress towards achieving the second MDG on "achieving universal primary education", and the sixth MDG on "combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases".

4. Despite the fact that the international community did not formulate an MDG on unemployment, in general, and on youth unemployment in particular, and the social cost implications of such unemployment, the World Bank in a series of reports on the region drew attention to such a development challenge. In response to such a challenge the Wolfensohn Center, of the Brookings Institute, formulated the Middle East Youth Initiative to encourage serious investigation of various aspects of streamlining this population category in development plans.

5. In addition to the above it is to be noted that the first Arab Human Development Report (AHDR; issued in 2002 by UNDP) on "Creating Opportunities for Future Generations", and after appreciating the development achievements of the Arab countries in various dimensions, identified a "deficit in women empowerment" as one of three major constraints on development in the various Arab countries. The detailed nature of such a deficit was further investigated in the fourth AHDR on "Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World", issued in 2006.

6. The first AHDR, and despite the difficulty of conducting survey-based research in the Arab countries, made a determined attempt at gleaning the views of Arab youth on the state of human development in their countries. Notwithstanding the reservations that could be raised regarding the sample design, the AHDR concluded that:

- "Overall, the poll clearly suggests that job availability is the most common concern of youth, followed by education"; and,
- "Remarkably, 51 per cent of older youths expressed a desire to migrate to other countries, clearly indicating their dissatisfaction with current conditions and future prospects in their home countries";
- "In general, the younger youths, particularly girls, seem to be somewhat more attached to their countries and aware of broad social issues such as participation and poverty".

7. The above, albeit briefly cited, recent literature on the development challenges facing Arab countries in the areas of streamlining women and youth in the development approaches of the region, constitute a rich basis for inquiry of the issues involved.

Objective of the Conference :

8. The **major objective** of the **Conference** is to provide a forum to debate the issues related to (i) the process of empowering Arab women to play their role in the development of the region and of streamlining such a role in the development approaches, plans, and strategies of the countries of the region; and, (ii) the process of arresting the observed exclusion of the Arab youth in their societies.

Themes of the Conference:

9. On the basis of the above observations the following broad themes for the Conference are identified:

(a) evaluation of the current economic, social or legal circumstances of Arab women from the perspective of development as freedom, and the exploration of approaches to improve them in the Arab region in general, or individual countries as case studies;

(b) evaluation of the current economic, social or legal circumstances of Arab youth from the perspective of development as freedom, and the exploration of approaches to improve them in the Arab region in general, or individual countries as case studies;

(c) a critical evaluation of the prospects for achieving the MDGs on women empowerment and gender equality on the one hand and those on youth on the other, in the Arab region or in individual countries as case studies. Such evaluation is to be centered on the resource implications of achieving the goals in question;

(d) a critical evaluation of the state of women, and youth, unemployment in the Arab countries and the exploration of non-conventional approaches to reduce such rates in the future and the policy implications of such approaches;

(e) development of relevant empirical methodologies for estimating the economic and social costs of excluding women and youth during the process of development;

(f) development of relevant analytical frameworks for policy evaluation, and policy formulation, regarding streamlining women and youth in development plans in Arab countries;

(g) review, and analysis, of the features of the current Arab gender reality and the exploration of changing trends; and,

(h) critical assessment of the economic and social policies followed by Arab countries in the last five decades, with emphasis on policies targeting women and youth (if any).

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