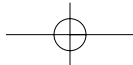
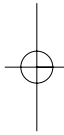
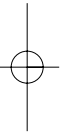
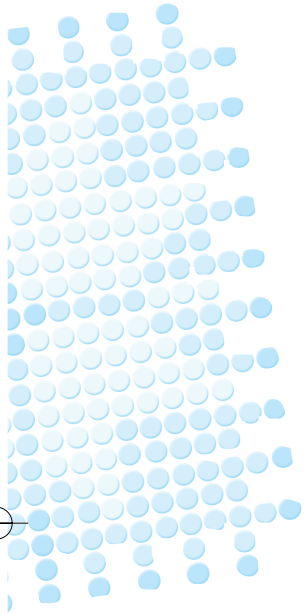
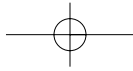


Summary

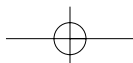




As the Arab Human Development Reports have made clear, important development challenges continue to face the Arab world and one of the key challenges identified is continued gender imbalance and the empowerment of women. Examining both progress and challenges, the key objective of this report is to serve as a tool for identifying unfulfilled promises and for revisiting current strategies and program of actions for protecting women's security in Arab states. The Report opens with a brief overview of what focusing on human security means, and how such a focus relates to the history of women's movements within the region. As was made clear in the recent Arab Human Development Report, the Arab-Islamic civilization has been a site of great intellectual progress and scholarship. Similarly, Arab and Muslim thinkers promoted greater gender justice for centuries. Yet the region faces great challenges for the human security of both women and men. The first chapter of the report investigates three levels of action in the region towards women's empowerment. The policy levels where international commitments are being made, the operational plans and actions at the national level, and most importantly, the achievements and challenges in terms of the every day lives of women.

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that, at the policy level, Arab countries have been a full and active partner in all relevant international forums and have adopted action plans that reflect the strategic orientation of the gender approach. Furthermore, reasonable progress has been witnessed in addressing a number of critical needs and in building capabilities.

Yet the translation into concrete change faces many obstacles, such as prevailing gender attitudes that continue to exert pressure on all women, regardless of their age, education or access to the public sphere. Furthermore, although in some countries there have been impressive changes on the legal front, customary treatment of women frustrates formal steps towards full and equal citizenship.



Women also continue to face gender inequality in their own homes. Women who are called upon to support their families in times of crisis are often left to do so without any opportunity for employment or social security protection. Inclusiveness, participation, and security are aspects of women's well-being that are not just absent, but are also unrecognized as legitimate needs. Chapter one calls for an explicit strategy and more concentrated actions to address identified threats for women's security.

First, the report outlines the need to understand the inter-relationship between the private and public spheres. In the Arab region, many women and men continue to see the family rather than the individual as the central unit in society. They ascribe to a relational model that emphasizes interactive exchange of rights and duties, and also defines the centrality of the family as a cultural asset that should be protected. This report does not challenge this view, but instead examines the ways in which women's insecurity can be perpetuated by the family to the detriment of women and the family unit itself. There is no tension between focusing on individual rights of women, and recognizing the importance of the family in society.

This report offers insight into how government family policies can further protect the private lives of women. Such policies revisit gender inequalities that are barriers to women's public contribution and to their safety in their own homes. These policies work to develop sustained and efficient family support systems, open up women's rooms for choice, and value their reproductive contributions to the family. Of particular importance in family policies is increasing women's ability to combine work with family responsibilities.

This chapter also identifies the need for a sustained and integrated strategy to address ideational change and to ensure a rights-based perspective. Stereotyped images and traditional gender perceptions continue to frustrate opportunities for all members of Arab society. Some conservative religious thinkers warn against the questioning and challenge of gender norms, believing they challenge the

very core of religion and historical Arab thought. This report echoes the Arab Human Development Report in arguing that such views are one interpretation of Arab and Muslim culture and certainly not definitive if one explores the vision that has underpinned the moral and humane principles of Islam and Arab society over time. Empowerment of women remains accepted as the means to achieve better welfare for the child, the family, and society. However, attaining women's rights as the goal for its own sake fuels greater debate as it relates to broad differences of opinion over the relationship between women's rights and culture.

Finally, this chapter illuminates the need to enhance the gender knowledge base. Country-level discussions are required to develop appropriate indicators that respond to different contextual specificities. These indicators should serve as 'social watch instruments' that can register unfulfilled commitments and assess progress.

The Arab world is diverse economically, socially, historically, and politically. Yet Arab people are linked in a variety of ways. The great majority are linked by common language (Arabic), religion (Islam), and cultural identity and heritage. The region continues to face traumas and insecurities including radical social transformations, demographic transitions, economic waves of affluence, poverty, and stagnation, and acute resource shortages as well as occupation, war, and civil strife and dissension. Chapter 2 examines ways to approach social security in such a diverse and dynamic context.

Upheavals in the region create dramatic social insecurity with individuals and institutions having to tide over difficult times by resorting to various safety nets that become strained. The resource that men and women have often turned to for social security in the Arab world has been the family. Because families are such vital social institutions, valuable cultural assets, and an integral part of the Arab identity, they are worth examining in light of social transformations and demographic transitions. Such an examination is detailed in chapter 2.

Although critical, families cannot now and will not be able to provide for the social security needs of women, children, and men if dramatic changes in policies, market, and welfare regimes are not introduced. If the nearly 80 million young Arabs between the ages of 15 to 29 can become productive citizens employed in well regulated, equitable, and vibrant labor markets, they will be able to bring about another wave of security and prosperity. If, however, young women and men remain un-trained, and unemployed, they will only further enhance the spiral of crisis that the Arab states have entered. For not only is the current social security condition of many Arab countries in a situation of crisis but the future holds more challenges. While Arab societies are now young they are only growing older. By 2025 the percentage of those aged 60+ in Egypt will be over 12%, in Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE it will be 25%, and in other Arab states it is projected to be around 10% of the population. Another important demographic change concerns marriage. Twenty-eight percent of women aged 30 to 34 have never married in Libya and in another five countries, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Syria, Qatar 10% of women were unmarried at ages 35–39. These changes in marriage patterns affect both fertility and morbidity trends.

Labor trends in the region also have an effect on social security. The participation of Arab women in the labor force remains the lowest of any region in the world. Indeed, whereas in 1996, women composed 40% of the world labor force, the participation of Arab women in the Middle East and North Africa region at the time did not exceed 26% of the labor force. A particularly interesting finding is that Arab countries with lower GDP, income, and education levels, such as Yemen, seem to have higher female labor force participation than countries with higher levels, such as Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

Sex disaggregated statistics on the share of women in the work force, where they are available, mask the wide range of work that women do every day in society in the informal economy. Even in the formal sector, however, women face great insecurity, low-status jobs, precarious contracts and even dangerous

working conditions. The impact of women's work on the family and on women themselves remains poorly understood.

Formal welfare regimes in most Arab states still suffer from the perception of women as dependent and secondary income earners. Based on such assumptions, family social welfare legislation denies women workers equal rights and fails to take into account the patterns and realities of female employment.

Female-headed households face additional challenges. Women who are divorced, widowed, or deserted, further emphasize the importance of granting full citizenship by law and by practice to all women. Otherwise they and their families remain on the margins of society, unable to voice their concerns or access legal protection and support.

After surveying the major demographic trends and contextual realities outlined above, Chapter Two recommends that the family unit become a research and policy priority. Revisiting family codes and state practices which make women's citizenship contingent on family relations, reforming welfare regimes so that they accommodate the needs of women and regulating labor markets with gender sensitive and flexible mechanisms are proposed as three key elements of social security.

Economic security as introduced in chapter three of the report refers to the need to protect people through the provision of job opportunities and a secure income. Economic security is more than satisfying basic needs. It comprises other nonmaterial aspects, including personal autonomy, economic rights, and effective participation in economic life. It calls for both women and men having access to resources, markets and credit. Economic security in the Arab countries is affected, among other things, by volatile changes in oil revenues, capital flows and workers remittances. The recent decline in the Arab countries' main sources of finance has resulted in the widening of government budget deficits. Moreover, the economic reform and structural adjustment pro-

grams adopted by most Arab countries in the early 1990s have led to the deepening of inequality, at least in the short-run, and increased risks to women's security.

The impact of globalization on economic opportunities remains uneven, between countries, within countries, and also between individuals. Structural adjustment programs that have often led to declines in public expenditure on social services, such as health, and education have increased insecurity for many. Moreover, economic integration has reduced the competitiveness of many informal firms and self-employed producers vis-a-vis large firms and imports. Usually the better-educated and younger women rather than the poorest women benefit from economic integration and globalization. Poor women continue to experience the risks and not the opportunities posed by increased globalization.

The rate of participation of Arab women in the labor markets has been the lowest in the world.. This report explores possible explanations for the consistently low share of women in the work force, including discriminatory practices entrenched at economic and social levels. These include traditions that emphasize women's domestic role, and depict men as the main financial supporters of the family. The continued perception that women are responsible for child care also likely diminishes their labour force participation, especially in the absence of childcare centers. Although labor laws in the Arab countries do not discriminate against women, family laws and regulations, such as maternity leave and limits on hours of work, often discourage employers from hiring women. Gender-based job segregation remains prevalent: men, in general, hold high managerial position compared to women. At the same time, women tend to get jobs with limited potential for promotion and career development. Moreover, women's economic rights, access to productive resources, credit and assets have often been impeded by institutional constraints and traditions resulting in a widely shared view that women are more at risk for extreme poverty.

Education and training, microfinance and access to other loan and financial services can enhance the opportunities for women's income generation. Yet, social safety nets remain crucial for ensuring protection during economic downturn. Women's contribution to the economy is often unrecognized and underappreciated. In most Arab countries, women's work in the informal sector fails to be registered in national censuses and accounts. Moreover, the opportunity cost of women's time is often neglected.

Chapter four "Securing Politics" re-examines possible explanations for the low political participation of women in Arab states. In sum, the report suggests that women are not active in politics because the political domain is not a safe and secure place for women's participation.

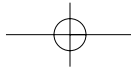
Some positive trends towards achieving international benchmarks (BPFA, CEDAW, Security Council Resolution 1325, and the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs) have been identified such as an increase in Arab women's representation in national parliaments, the establishment of the Arab Women's Organization and the rising role of NGOs. Nevertheless, a number of critical problems, are raised in chapter four. Our analysis suggests that although some successes have been registered at the highest levels of government, political institutions that affect the daily lives of women often remain beyond their reach. Structural and customary factors continue to limit women's participation in national, religious, and local decision-making. It is necessary to ensure that political leaders' initiatives and decisions be filtered down to ordinary citizens including women. In addition, ensuring that legislation that is passed to protect women's security actually brings about real change, is critical.

Although the chapter attempts to identify trends in the political, economic and social obstacles facing Arab Women in the political domain, it is important to emphasize that the number of successful professional women in executive positions in a variety of Arab countries is a real accomplishment. It is necessary to continue to support, and increase the number of these women.

Chapter 4 provides four contributions: First, problem identification: women are not active in politics because politics is not a safe and secure domain in which to participate. Second, Methodological weaknesses: Most of the studies on political participation tend to measure the political participation of women by focusing on quantitative indicators that assess the percentage of women in decision-making positions: in the executive, in the legislative, in the political parties, etc. However, the indicators usually fail to explain why women end up with certain political portfolios that tend to reinforce their traditional roles. There is a need to combine quantitative with further qualitative analysis that aims to understand the experience of women participating in the political realm. Third, Conceptualization of political participation. This chapter suggests understanding the dynamic nature of political participation and power. Political power is often situational and context specific. Women holding high offices may still not have the freedom to exercise political power. In addition, many informal networks and societal actors exercise great political influence. Analysis should encompass both "informal" and "formal" politics for a fuller understanding of political power and the opportunities and risks for women. Finally chapter four also gives attention to outcome and impact. Paralleling the analysis above, research must delve into how political goals and objectives translate into real changes in the lives of women.

The third section of chapter four relates the analysis above to the overarching theme of the Report: women's security. Politics provides a forum for women to express their wants and fears and shape the actions and policies to address them. The fourth section of the chapter looks at the road ahead, and suggests the following strategies to effect real change in women's lives: create a policy environment that protects women's security by bridging the gap between private (family) and public (political domain); promoting political reform; and the formulating gender sensitive policies to enhance women's participation.

The concluding remarks address the common themes and principles that are the main messages of the Report. The chapters are founded on the fundamental



importance of achieving women's security, an objective that can only be achieved through social, political and economic change that translates into real differences in the lives of women in the Arab world. They do so with reference to the four arenas of policy, society, economy, polity, and they speak to approximately 140 millions of Arab women.

