

SURVIVAL FOR SUSTAINABILITY

ALECSO's vision to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab World

Enlightened partnership, rather than tweeting out of the flock

Proceeding from its commitment toward the Arab Nation, and keen on promoting sustainable development for the present and future generations, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) offers a clear-sighted vision for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development announced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This vision proceeds from an Arab regional perspective that is open to the world and involved in the shaping of its future. It emanates from an organization specialized in the fields of education, culture and sciences, amidst highly complex circumstances in which many countries are struggling not for growth and sustainability, but rather for survival.

The development of this vision, which takes into consideration the specificities of the Arab region and the circumstances it is currently experiencing, is part of an enlightened global partnership for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through this vision, ALECSO seeks to draw attention to the fact that the serious events and developments taking place in the Arab region will have adverse consequences on the world as a whole. It is, therefore, imperative to boost global cooperation so as to help the Arab region get out of its crisis. This is indeed a strategic prerequisite for establishing world peace and security, and for promoting sustainable development in all Arab countries.

The reality is that the Arab world is no longer expected to play the role it could have played in the past. In fact, oil revenues, which previously enabled Arab countries to support development programs in the poorest countries through large governmental development funds,

relief programs of charitable associations and other mechanisms, have declined. Moreover, almost a third of Arab countries are currently embroiled in conflicts, violence and terrorism, and no longer have the needed administrative, organizational and statistical capacities to monitor and measure their development indicators, and to plan for the future.

ALECSO's vision for the achievement of sustainable development is centered on education, being the path conducive to a better quality of life. Education is, in fact, tightly linked to all fields of development, and lies at the core of the Arab World's battle for survival and for the preservation of its identity.

This document addresses the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals in relation to the Arab world, taking into consideration the specificity and complexity of the Arab scene.

While submitting this document to the Arab governments and to regional and international organizations, we hope our insightful vision will be given all due attention and consideration. We also hope that the Arab Nation will be able to rebound and to pursue its growth on sound intellectual and methodological grounds.

Dr. Abdullah Hamad Muhareb

Director General of ALECSO

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1 - Education for sustainable development in the Arab World : A necessity for survival

(Goals 4 and 5)

Since the early 1990s, the literature on human development has emphasized the strong link between education and the concept of human development in its various dimensions. In fact, investment in education can only yield developmental benefits in terms of health, income, public freedoms, and other fields.

In the Arab world, however, the paradox lies in the fact that education is increasingly accused of being responsible, among other factors, for the current situation in crisis-stricken Arab societies, and for driving other Arab societies into experiencing similar setbacks.

Accordingly, raising the slogan of “education for sustainable development in the Arab World” necessitates a thorough examination of the relationship between the quality of education provided by Arab educational systems over the past decades, which was below expectations, and the current state of affairs in some Arab societies. Otherwise, it would be a leap into the unknown and a denial of reality, as it does not take into consideration current indicators in the Arab world.

The UN education-related discourse focused, at the beginning of the 1990s, on the notions of accessibility and comprehensiveness. Then at the dawn of the new millennium, focus shifted toward quality and equity. At the same time, there was another discourse that concentrated more on excellence and distinction, amidst rivalry with emerging Asian systems. Such a discourse has managed to work its way into the educational policies of developing, including Arab, countries. These countries then started to adopt standards that exceed their capacities, paying no heed to the existing social disparities. The role of the state, in several Arab systems, has been diminished; private education is increasingly gaining ground; and schizophrenic policies have been adopted : they neither achieved accessibility, nor guaranteed quality, nor reached the ranks of competition and

excellence. This situation has produced an educational and cultural scene marked by acute disparities, and has given rise to a large segment of disgruntled youth, thereby providing a fertile ground for growing hatred and violence.

In light of the foregoing, ALECSO believes that education should rank first in the Arabic version of the SDG agenda, but with qualitative, enlightening features in addition to the standard features included in the UN agenda. Education, in the eyes of ALECSO, should be “inspiring” and “enlightening”, in the face of closedmindedness. It should promote love, compassion and tolerance, in the face of cruelty, hatred and violence. Education should enable learners to become full-fledged citizens in their societies, enjoying their rights and accomplishing their duties.

ALECSO also considers it necessary to put an end to the Arab double discourse with regard to education, especially that the Arab Nation is facing a crisis of identity that has disrupted its orientations and priorities, a crisis of knowledge that has reduced its capacities and its civilizational contribution, and a crisis of ethics that has undermined its system of values and deepened its internal disparities.

Manifestations of the crisis

- *Limited expenditures are allocated to education in the Arab world, in comparison with other areas of government spending, particularly, armament, with huge disparities across countries in terms of expenditures.*
- *In many Arab systems, there is a duplication of educational discourse and policies, between the holistic approach and the free approach.*
- *Alphabetical illiteracy rates are increasing, despite the great and varied efforts to combat it.*
- *The educational systems of at least four (4) Arab countries have totally or partially collapsed; and the systems of seven other Arab*

countries suffer serious deficiencies, amidst lack of accurate information and statistics.

- *There are serious deficiencies in terms of knowledge acquisition and production skills (epistemological civilizational crisis).*
- *Accessibility and quality of education vary across Arab countries.*
- *There are disparities between boys and girls; between urban and rural areas, between public and private education, and between religious and civic education.*
- *Technical education is of poor quality, with a declining demand for this type of education in society and in the job market.*
- *Education systems suffer from poor governance and low competence.*
- *Education curricula are inflated, but with poor and incoherent content.*
- *There is a quantitative and qualitative deficiency in terms of qualified teaching staff, with inadequate teacher-training and professional development programs.*
- *There is a significant decline in the educational role of Arab families, with limited family-school relationship.*

Urgent and medium-term priorities

- *Conduct a field study to monitor damages and losses, to identify problems, and to assess needs in conflict zones, where security conditions permit;*
- *Draw up an integrated strategy to provide basic, complementary and alternative educational opportunities for education-deprived children in conflict zones. This involves using technologies in education and training, offering the basic necessities and psychological care, and providing assistance to persons with special needs;*
- *Address the shortage of qualified teaching staff in conflict zones, and provide training to a sufficient number of learning facilitators (especially girls);*

- *Make intensive use of technologies to overcome funding and security difficulties and to convey educational contents to deprived children and youth in dangerous areas;*
- *Adopt various methods to finance reconstruction projects and to upgrade educational systems in conflict-stricken countries. This involves seeking contributions from donors and promoting educational “Waqfs” (endowments);*
- *Draw up detailed strategies to restore and rehabilitate the collapsing educational systems in Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq, including infrastructures, equipments, and teacher training.*

Strategic priorities

- *Adopt an Arab education-related discourse that can face up to cultural and educational challenges and to the threats to Arab national security, and that can promote the values of enlightenment, love and coexistence, within an institutional and human rights-based framework;*
- *Establish balanced educational policies that promote social justice and provide equal educational opportunities, in addition to the launch of initiatives and community partnerships;*
- *Adopt educational strategies to bridge the knowledge gap and build knowledge production and acquisition capacities;*
- *Activate the “Arab Decade for Literacy and Adult Education”, whose vision reflects the “concept of civilizational leadership of the Arab Nation, through the formation of literate citizens who are versatile development actors”;*
- *Establish community partnerships with the private sector under State supervision, as part of national educational strategies;*
- *Establish efficient systems to guarantee education quality;*
- *Establish advanced systems for teacher education and professional development, and adopt fair rules and regulations for wages and salaries, and for the granting of professional license to practice teaching.*

2 - Cultural development: A prerequisite for sustainable development

Efforts to make “culture” a principal axis in sustainable development systems have been deficient in the Arab World. Moreover, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda has not devoted a special goal to culture.

Culture is mentioned only in Target 4.7 of Goal 4, ensuring, by 2030, that “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development” through various means including the “promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”.

On the other hand, Goal 11, concerning cities and human settlements, consider cities as “hotbeds of ideas, trade, culture, science, productivity, social development and more.” Within this goal, Target 11.4 aims to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”.

Whatever the justifications behind the lack of a special goal devoted to the cultural field, culture will always remain the driving force for all social changes, and the guarantee for the success of any development policy.

As defined by UNESCO in the 1982 Mexico Declaration, culture is “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.”

On its part, the 1985 Comprehensive Plan for Arab Culture defines culture as “the whole complex of distinctive material, spiritual, intellectual, artistic and emotional features that characterize a nation. It includes the set of established values, knowledge, and ethical obligations, the modes of aesthetic, artistic knowledge and technical thinking and creativity, as well as the modes of behavior and expression. It also involves Man’s aspirations for lofty ideals, his

endeavors to review human achievements, as well as his continued search for new significances for human life, values and future, and for creating all that can enable him to surpass himself.”

The plan views Arab culture as reflective of the Arab Nation, manifesting itself through :

- The Nation’s tangible and spiritual heritage which constitutes its distinctive features, values and civilizational image across the ages, as embodied through its Arab and Islamic dimensions;*
- The Nation’s life behavior and creative contributions and accomplishments, and the underlying system of values and ideals;*
- The Nation’s ambitions and goals for the future.*

The three elements are indissociable; for culture is a unified entity that is closely tied to the formation of each nation, and constitutes the essence of human life and existence. It is the collective conscience of the nation and the guarantor of its cohesion.

Furthermore, culture serves as a driving force for sustainable development. In this context, the Inter-governmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm, Sweden, 1998) stressed the tight correlation between sustainable development and cultural revitalization. Moreover, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) considers cultural diversity as an invaluable wealth for individuals and societies, and that the protection and promotion of this diversity are a prerequisite to achieve sustainable development for the present and future generations.

According to the Comprehensive Plan for Arab Culture, culture is :

- a means of instilling in the Arab people the sense of confidence and hope as to the Arab Nation’s ability to overcome circumstantial difficulties, however serious they are, and to achieve the highest level of advancement;*
- a means of strengthening the Nation’s unity. The Arabic language is the vehicle through which the Arab culture has carried the*

message of Arab unity across the ages, in a way almost unmatched in the history of universal cultures;

- a means of self-assertion and self-differentiation;*
- a means to give the members of the Nation a sense of reassuredness, and to dismiss any feeling of alienation and estrangement, as cultural activities are closely linked to human dignity, through which Man can fully exercise his freedom;*
- a means to share high ideals and to promote mutual understanding with other nations and peoples.*

It is clear, in light of the foregoing, that development cannot be reduced to economic growth only. More than that, it is the path conducive to a decent mental, emotional, moral and spiritual life. It cannot, therefore, be dissociated from culture.

The concept of culture encompasses various types of values :

- Fundamental values, including justice, religious tolerance, and rejection of racism;*
- Social values, involving the community's collective responsibility to serve its interests;*
- Economic values, which call for beneficial action;*
- Intellectual and cultural values, which call for fighting illiteracy, acquiring knowledge, respecting other cultures, and preserving heritage;*
- National values, which encompass the values of citizenship and commitment to defend the Arab Nation, enhance its status, and serve its interests; and*
- Bodily values, involving the preservation of health.*

These values not only represent the fourth dimension of sustainable development (along with the economic, social and environmental dimensions), they are indeed a prerequisite for achieving development and ensuring its sustainability.

In this context, the UN Security Council Resolution 223/68, adopted on 20 December 2013, on Culture and Sustainable Development,

“recognizes the potential of culture as a driver of sustainable development, and acknowledges that quality education is enriched by culture which transmits shared values, knowledge and skills.” It follows that cultures lies at the forefront of the means of achieving the 17 SDGs.

In this overview, focus is laid only on the goals in which culture has a prominent place.

Knowledge in youth is wisdom in age

Target 4.7 of Goal 4 of the Agenda aims to ensure that by 2030, “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development... through the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” Moreover, Goal 16 of the Agenda, dealing with peace, justice and institutions, stresses that societies need justice and democracy in order to achieve sustainable development.

These goals fall in line with the objectives spelled out in ALECSO’s Strategic Plan (2017-2022) whose first focus area aims at “achieving enlightened interaction with world cultures”. The second program within this focus area involves “promoting the culture of coexistence and constructive dialogue and combating violent extremism and terrorism”, while the third program concerns the “development of Arab children’s scientific culture in an evolving world.” In this regard, special focus will be laid on children, being the principal aim of the Organization’s efforts to build a better future.

Science tells us that brain programming is done at an early age, mostly during the first seven years. It follows that giving all due attention to the building of the child’s senses and behavior patterns is a decisive matter on the basis of which our future will be shaped and determined.

Today and more than ever before, we are called on to grant all due attention, at all levels and by all available means, to the education of

our children, by instilling in them, from an early age, the sense of national belonging and commitment to defend the homeland and protect its assets, including cultural heritage, and by imbuing them with the values of moderation, tolerance, dialogue, acceptance of the other and of different opinions, and rejection of all forms of terrorism, extremism and violence. These values constitute, in fact, the essence of our sublime religion and our authentic cultural heritage.

ALECSO considers it necessary to integrate Arab youth within the sustainable development system, and to enhance partnership with youth organizations and CSOs. It, in fact, believes that the progress of peoples largely depends on the contribution of their youth, and that excluding young people from active participation in public affairs will have adverse consequences, as it may undermine social cohesion and create, among youth, a sense of hopelessness that breeds extremism. It is, therefore, imperative to increase youth integration in all political, economic, social and cultural spheres. In this regard, it is necessary to :

- Enable youth to unleash their latent abilities, through communication in spaces of dialogue and interaction;*
- Highlight the important role of the media and satellite channels in publicizing the Arab culture and the true message of Islam, and in highlighting the distinguished contribution of the Arab World to the advancement of humanity;*
- Address the root causes of poverty and unemployment, and encourage young people to launch small projects;*
- Spread, at all levels and by all means, the culture of tolerance, moderation, and rejection of violence, radicalization and extremism.*

Urgent priorities

- Establish a joint Arab plan of action to counter extremist thinking, with the participation of specialists and experts in the fields of media, culture, education, religious affairs, humanities, sociology, psychology...;*

- *Draw up an Arab code of values so as to instill in younger generations the values of citizenship and the culture of decent life, peaceful existence, and rejection of extremism;*
- *Implement the Arab cartoon project “Tammour and Tammoura” so that it can play its role in raising awareness among all age groups and in all Arab societies;*
- *Revive the “Arab Cultural Days” project, and make sure these events are periodically organized in Arab and foreign capitals;*
- *Encourage cultural tourism in Arab countries, in line with the recommendations adopted by the Forum held by ALECSO on “the role of cultural tourism in combating terrorism among youth” (May 27, 2016);*
- *Strengthen efforts targeted at Arab communities abroad, especially youth, and pursue visits organized for migrant youth to Arab countries.*
- *Include, within educational curricula, themes and activities that strengthen the sense of belonging and identity.*

Development of creative and cultural industries

Goal 12 aims to “ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”. One of its targets is to “develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.”

As of 2014, the Arab World population reached 378 millions. 60% live in urban areas, and a third of the population is aged 15 or less. The expanding size of this population group makes it necessary to speed up the pace of job-generating economic growth, and to provide wider education opportunities.

The 2015 Joint Arab Economic Report indicates that Arab States, with few exceptions, have managed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and are, therefore, capable of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Yet, though social indicators have significantly improved, most Arab countries are still facing difficulties in the education and health sectors. Unemployment is also increasing among educated youth. Women's presence in the job market has relatively decreased (about 22.2% in 2013, the lowest rate in comparison to other regions in the world). The United Arab Emirates, which ranks 1st in the Arab World in terms of Knowledge Economy Indicator, ranks 42nd globally, the Sultanate of Oman 47th, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 50th.

Cultural industries also have a large potential for job creation. They contribute to social and economic development, and to the preservation of the environment, as they are non-polluting industries.

Urgent priorities

- Record and digitalize the tangible and intangible cultural heritage in order to protect it from loss, damage or destruction, and to facilitate access to it, especially manuscripts, archeological monuments and museums which, as shown by recent events, are exposed to a real danger. It is, therefore, necessary to document them so that they can be restored in case of partial or total damage or destruction;*
- Coordinate Arab efforts in the fields of culture, arts and archeology, so as Arab citizens can best benefit from them;*
- Promote handicrafts industries and products all over the Arab World;*
- Establish a mechanism for the financing of the Arab cultural development projects scheduled in the Arab Plan for Arab Culture (2011).*

Cities : Hubs for development

Goal 11 is to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." Target 11.4 related to this goal aims to

“strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”.

ALECSO seeks to serve this goal, which lies at the core of its concerns, through its own programs or as part of cooperation and partnership with the concerned regional and international organizations, as well as with the relevant Arab institutions. This action will be pursued and enhanced under the Organization’s Strategic Plan (2017-2022), particularly the fifth program of the first focus area related to heritage preservation.

In addition to historical monuments and archaeological sites, ALECSO is concerned with the preservation of the identity and heritage of Arab cities, and with all fields related to sustainable urban development. It seeks to strengthen the contribution of culture and heritage to the sustainable development of cities. In fact, culture and heritage are two levers for development, providing job opportunities in environment-friendly cultural industries, and offering spaces for dialogue, social integration, and rejection of subversive behaviors.

ALECSO also works to preserve the memory of Arab cities, to utilize their heritage in the service of sustainable development, and to publicize them as a cultural tourist destination. In this regard, it launched, in October 2016, the Observatory of Urban and Architectural Heritage in the Arab World. A unit for the management of this project is currently being established, with the principal task of preserving Arab historical cities and publicizing best experiences regarding cultural heritage and its role in promoting sustainable urban development.

ALECSO was also involved, alongside UNESCO, in preparing the world report on the cultural strategy for the restoration of old houses and the revival of historical cities. This report was presented in the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III - Quito, Ecuador - October 2016). ALECSO prepared the section on the Arab World.

Arab cultural heritage under fire

Rather than striving to promote development and achieve progress, several Arab countries are embroiled in armed conflicts. Conflicting parties are destroying not only their present and future, but also their cultural heritage. Some of them are following a systematic policy of cultural cleansing, in addition to ethnic cleansing, out of a desire to negate the other and obliterate his existence and identity.

Given the historical specificity of the Arab World, being the cradle of civilizations and of the revealed religions, this policy of systematic ethnic cleansing constitutes a serious threat whose disastrous consequences will not only affect the future generations, but will be extended forever. This means that some of the basic foundations of the Arab identity may fade away from the collective consciousness, and may even disappear from physical existence.

Urgent priorities

- Complete the virtual visits to the historical cities and archaeological sites in tourist circuits in Arab countries;*
- Develop the “Arab Cultural Capital” program;*
- Conduct a study on the contribution of historical cities to economic life, including the promotion of cultural tourism and the encouragement of creative persons in the fields of arts, sciences, technologies...etc.;*
- Combat attacks against cultural heritage especially in times of conflicts, crises and wars, and cooperate with all official and non-official parties and all civil society components to restore the damaged sites;*
- Help Arab countries to draw up clear strategies to preserve their cultural heritage and make best use of it in the service of sustainable development, and urge them to revise laws protecting this heritage;*
- Establish a reference legal framework for the protection of Arab cultural heritage against looting and smuggling;*

- *Organize fairs and exhibitions to further raise awareness among Arab citizens as to the problems of cities and their impact on their daily life and on future generations.*
- *Pursue the implementation of ALECSO's projects related to heritage games, considered as an essential component of cultural identity that goes beyond the mere leisure activity to encompass training on fair competition, skill development, and social interaction within the community and with the other;*
- *Organize training workshops for capacity-building in terms of intangible cultural heritage;*
- *Organize training workshops on heritage management in times of conflicts, and on the measures to revive cultural heritage;*
- *Urge Arab States to ratify and enforce international conventions relating to the preservation of architectural and urban heritage;*
- *Integrate archeology and heritage within Arab education curricula.*

3 Human poverty : a complex conception of the triple dimensions of default

(Goals 1, 2, 3 and 8)

Measuring the levels of poverty in the Arab world poses a true methodological problem. This is due to various factors, including the existence of various definitions of poverty, the nature of the relevant indicators, and the degree of reliability of statistics.

As a result, poverty, in its traditional economic sense, not to mention the complex meaning of human poverty (in a more complex and multidimensional sense that includes income, education, health and freedoms), cannot be accurately monitored. Besides, dealing with the Arab World as a unified entity, with no regard to the differences and disparities existing across Arab countries, can only be a misleading approach.

Despite the UN optimistic discourse concerning the halving of poverty in the world during the past quarter of a century, the fact remains that in many parts of the world, including the majority of Arab countries, the current situation does not inspire great optimism. In fact, tens of millions of people have left their countries fleeing the armed conflicts that erupted in four Arab countries. Moreover, tens of millions of people have seen their incomes fall dramatically as a result of the popular uprisings that had broken out since 2011 in protest against the deterioration of living conditions, the lack of political freedoms, and the spread of corruption.

What is remarkable is that most of the countries whose conditions have deteriorated during the past five years had, immediately before the outbreak of popular uprisings, achieved positive economic growth rates, and had followed structural adjustment policies in line with the directives of international institutions. The theory they had adopted assumes that offering incentives to investors and allowing them to build fortunes would necessarily have an impact on the lower segments of society.

The foregoing demonstrates that economic growth rates are not truly reflective of economic achievements and of their real impact on the life of ordinary citizens. It also shows that economic reform and investment promotion policies will not be successful unless they are accompanied by social protection policies.

Despite the close relationship, existing in theory, between the spread of education and the improvement of quality of life, some Arab countries represent an exceptional case, as the advances made in terms of access to education have been associated with rising unemployment and poverty rates, especially among girls.

Moreover, literacy campaigns not accompanied by economic empowerment programs are one of the main shortcomings of the Arab development performance, especially as regards women who support nearly a fourth of Arab low-income families. As the saying goes, “poverty has a woman’s face”; this time, an Arab woman’s face.

Another manifestation of the notion of human poverty can be seen in nutrition where sharp disparities exist across Arab societies : in some high-income societies, malnutrition threatens over-fed children with obesity and diseases; in low-income societies, malnutrition threatens underfed children with school failure.

The Arab world is threatened not only in its national security, but also in its food security. In fact, most Arab countries suffer from water scarcity, especially those known for their rivers!!! Besides, reserves of basic food stuffs are insufficient in most countries, and wheat imports in some Arab countries are many times higher than what is produced locally. At the same time, vast arable lands in other countries remain uncultivated.

Bureaucracy and corruption are two concurrent variables behind the rising poverty and food insecurity in the Arab World. Moreover, government support to low-income segments of society provides a fertile field for corruption and for creating fortunes in an illegal manner. Still worse, some basic products and foodstuffs are imported without complying with safety requirements and specifications. This, in

the end, causes health problems for millions of citizens, which in turn puts severe strain on the budgets of individuals and governments, amidst a serious deficiency in terms of healthcare services.

Education and poverty elimination in the Arab world

Inclusive and equitable quality education has, once again, proved to be one of the most efficient means to combat poverty, especially if it adopts the concept of “capability poverty” instead of the notion of poverty in its traditional sense, and if it ceases to establish this uncertain link between specific types of education and poor segments of society.

In fact, human poverty is no longer confined to those with low levels of education. Besides, education to fight poverty now means much more than merely helping poor illiterate people to improve their economic level by acquiring some skills and launching small-scale productive projects. On its part, “technical education” no longer means providing poor young people with training so that they can join, at an early age, the job market. In reality, everybody needs to have his capacities developed so as to be able to effectively access the world of work and production.

Urgent priorities

- *Adopt efficient national policies to fight corruption and to promote administrative reform, so as to guarantee that vulnerable segments of society receive government support;*
- *Adopt smart social protection policies to accompany national structural adjustment programs policies (not involving reliance on borrowing);*
- *Support community-led efforts to combat illiteracy (especially among girls), through economic empowerment projects aimed at improving social conditions for the targeted populations,*

- increasing their income, strengthening their relations with the world around them, and increasing their social participation;*
- *Assess the impact of the efforts exerted, and the efficiency of the means used, to combat illiteracy in the Arab world (Education Development Plan, and ALECSO Strategic Plan 2017-2022).*

4 - Redefining the orientations of the Arab economy

(Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10)

Few oil-producing countries have succeeded in achieving a qualitative leap in the nature of their economies. They have, in fact, realized that a rentier economy based exclusively on crude oil revenues will continuously be exposed to circumstantial crises and setbacks, especially in view of the volatility of oil prices. They have, therefore, moved toward the industrial economy, including the tourism industry, and have adopted active policies to rationalize their citizens' lifestyles and patterns of consumption.

Other economies, however, have not managed to adjust the nature of their activities, and continued to wholly rely on oil revenues in financing their development projects, responding, in the process, to external and domestic factors, and facing endless crises and setbacks.

As for non-oil-producing countries, most of their emerging economic experiences in 1950s and 1960s suffered severe setbacks. Then, political and ideological changes in the 1970s and 1980s caused them to shift from the planned economy to the free-market economy, and from an economy based on heavy industries and agro-processing, to one based on consumption industries and services. These changes have, over the past four decades, undermined most of their industrial and agricultural foundations, giving rise, in the end, to a mixed economic model based on the taxation of low-income categories and the establishment of incentives for investors. This has, in turn, created new social categories enjoying high economic advantages and capacities, and led, at the same time, to the shrinking of the so-called "middle class", with large segments of the population falling into various levels of poverty.

On the other hand, the popular uprisings in the countries of the so-called "Arab spring" have not succeeded in introducing real changes in their economies, more particularly in their economic orientations, economic structures, or patterns of production and consumption. Under the pressure of popular protests and the changing of ruling

regimes, their economic policies have been disrupted, and their growth rates have gone down. This has caused them to seek loans from international financial institutions, a step that is usually accompanied by severe measures of austerity and decrease of government support for vulnerable social categories. This time again, it is these vulnerable groups that are left to bear the consequences.

While the literature on development establishes a dialectical relationship between economic orientation and quality of education, the education and employment policies currently adopted in some Arab countries show that it is a one-way relationship. With its inadequate quality and content, education is incapable of meeting the needs of the job market. The result is that many educational disciplines are largely dependent on the supply and demand mechanism within an unstable, fluctuating market, with no regard to planning requirements and medium- and long-term socio-economic development strategies. This has led huge numbers of university graduates to join the already crowded ranks of the unemployed.

Accordingly, in light of the notion of “sustainability”, Arab economies should no longer be left vulnerable to the fluctuations of financial markets and global monopolies. It is no longer possible to adopt development models based on taxation, or on the proceeds of the sale of raw materials, or even on services and other non-productive models. Moreover, it is no longer possible to lose sight of the nature of socio-cultural structures existing in Arab societies and their impact, both negative and positive, on economic development plans. It is, therefore, necessary for several Arab countries to redefine their economic orientations toward meeting the requirements of sustainability.

The notion of Arab economic integration remains the last resort for all Arab national economies. For the Arab world is an integrated geo-cultural entity, with diversity being one of its major characteristics.

Quality education that is capable of providing learners with the needed capacities to promote their countries’ development and to lift their societies out of poverty remains, according to the economist Amartya, the only way out. In reality, poverty, in its true sense, is the poverty of

capabilities, and freedom, in its essence, is tightly linked to development.

Urgent priorities

- *Adopt national economic reform and structural adjustment policies (not involving reliance on borrowing), accompanied by social protection policies for vulnerable categories;*
- *Adopt national policies to diversify productive economic activities, in accordance with the distinctive advantages of each country, within a framework of Arab economic integration;*
- *Draw up national employment and training policies based on an accurate description of jobs and occupations, and characterized by flexibility and adaptability to various areas of specialization;*
- *Establish national media strategies to adjust behavior and patterns of consumption, and raise awareness of the importance of resource preservation.*

Strategic priorities

- *Bring education development in line with the needs of integrated, comprehensive and sustainable development, and with the requirements of global changes;*
- *Establish linkages between education planning, social planning, poverty alleviation programs, and regional planning to achieve balanced development;*
- *Establish linkages between education planning and economic planning so as to address the discrepancy between the job market and the level of development on the one hand, and the outputs of education, on the other hand;*
- *Strengthen Arab education systems' capacity for change so as to meet social needs, in line with the principle of equity;*
- *Improve the quality of basic education in such a way as to avoid waste of funds and relapse into illiteracy;*

- *Link basic education with development needs, and promote technical and vocational education;*
- *Develop education curricula, and upgrade some universities and technical institutes so that they become producers of job-generators rather than producers of job-seekers, through providing graduates with research, development, innovation, and entrepreneurship skills;*
- *Adopt an Arab youth employment strategy, support free initiative, and establish secure labor systems;*
- *Establish bridges between research centers and higher education institutions on the one hand, and industrial enterprises on the other hand, as part of Arab national innovation systems.*

5 - Justice, institutions...and peace

(Goals 10, 11 and 16)

The current situation in the Arab World is the consequence of the political, economic, cultural and social changes and developments that have occurred over the past four decades. The lack of security and stability in many parts of the Arab world, as a result of armed conflicts and terrorist acts, is, in reality, the end result of accumulating disparities and deficiencies in terms of social justice, freedoms and rule of law. At the same time, no sound institutional approaches, and no adequate socio-economic policies and legislations have been adopted to address those deficiencies.

Some analyses point to the failure of the modern-state model in several Arab experiences to bring about real change in the socio-cultural structures of Arab societies. For these structures have easily and strikingly responded to the factors of disintegration, polarization, and even armed conflicts, on grounds that have nothing to do with the notion of modernity.

The proliferation of violence on religious, ethnic or factional grounds represents the gloomiest aspect of the stereotypical image of Arabs held in the collective consciousness of the West; this image being synonymous with extremism and terrorism.

Accusations are often leveled at educational systems, at the religious discourse, and at the system of laws regulating rights and freedoms, being all responsible for such a situation, and serving to justify calls for foreign interference to reform these systems often in accordance with double standards.

As part of the notion of “sustainability” that governs all development visions, the concepts of “peace”, “justice” and “institutionalization” represent objective conditions for the materialization of those visions. They are closely tied to the concept of sustainability at the ontological level. In fact, promoting institutionalization at the social level guarantees objectivity in dealing with society’s issues, as well as

respect for the law, the establishment of justice, the disappearance of the causes of conflict, and the promotion of social peace.

Accordingly, the call for rallying global efforts to achieve fair, institutionalized peace and to promote sustainable development should not lose sight of the conflicts and collapses occurring in the most geo-strategically important region in the world. It follows that the issue of establishing peace all over the Arab world should rank first on the development agenda. This is, to a far extent, like defusing a bomb before it explodes.

Evidence indicates that internal socio-cultural factors, coupled with the adoption of irrational approaches, have driven some Arab societies into internal conflicts and self-destruction. Accordingly, the Arabic version of the Sustainable Development Agenda should carry a special understanding with regard to the promotion of peace and the building of societies based on justice and institutions through an education-based approach. The hoped-for education should, in fact, instill the values of equity, love and coexistence, counter the factors of self-destruction, and draw a different image of the Arab World in relation to the other.

Urgent priorities

- *Guarantee the right to education for all, without distinction or discrimination, based on the principle of equal opportunities in terms of access, treatment and success, and avoid the emergence of a new socio-economic reality resulting from the knowledge gap;*
- *Foster the role of educational systems in entrenching the Arab national culture, and in deepening awareness of core Arab causes;*
- *Build capacities to promote education for citizenship, anchor the values of justice and peace, promote respect for universal and religious values and for the right to difference, and strengthen the sense of Arab national belonging;*

- *Draw up an Arab plan based essentially on the establishment of peace, the fight against terrorism, and the deradicalization of youth.*

6 - Human coexistence : A safe environment

(Goals 7, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15)

The Arab vision for the relationship between the human being and the natural environment proceeds from deep-rooted spiritual beliefs that Man is a trustee and custodian of the natural environment. Man should, therefore, take best advantage of the environment, without causing it any harm or ruin.

The spiritual nature of this vision is an aspect that has not been adequately highlighted in a way that allows Arabs, in their everyday behavior, to positively contribute to the preservation of their environment.

By their very nature, environment and ethics are closely inter-related; and there is no future for a nation that abandons any of them. The environment is the space where we live, with its biodiversity and varied natural resources. Ethics, on the other hand, is the main guarantor for natural balance between Man and his environment. Ethics is a system of moral principles and values that drives the individual to do whatever is useful and beneficial, and to avoid whatever is harmful and destructive. If we relate the notion of ethics to the environment, we find that any act that protects and safeguards the environment is ethical, and any harmful act is unethical. This is the essence of what is referred to as “environmental ethics”.

A WHO report (2015) indicates that pollution rates in the Arab World are on the rise, and that four Arab countries are among the 10 most polluted countries in the world. The list includes three low-populated, high-income oil-producing countries having made significant education advances. It also includes high-populated, low-income countries.

The report questions the existence of a fixed relationship between variables : population density, economic and educational level, and pollution. It also calls into question the view that environmental pollution is the direct result of urbanization and industrialization, both necessitating the production of huge quantities of energy. In fact, reports in one of the States indicate that pollution in rural areas is at

almost the same level as in urban areas, as a result of the unsafe large-scale disposal of agricultural waste. The matter is thus related to other factors, including people's traditions and daily behaviors.

The fact that Arab countries prefer traditional energy production methods though they can use other alternatives, and prefer traditional farming methods though these are water-intensive and cause a waste of natural resources, means that there is an inadequate understanding of the relationship between the present and the future, coupled with a sense of irresponsibility vis-à-vis the future generations. This is also related to the degree of congruity between behaviors and beliefs, and the degree of closeness between what is economic and utilitarian, and what is spiritual and doctrinal; and here the question arises about the idea of reconciliation with oneself, and accordingly, with the universe and with nature.

This finds its illustration in the proliferation of armed conflicts in various parts of the Arab World, and the resulting losses of the Arab natural resources. It is indeed a real tragedy to see the warring factions in conflict areas plunder natural resources to cover the expenses of armed conflicts, or even dissipate these resources so that their enemies will not benefit from them, thereby adopting a scorched earth policy.

In the same context, a UNEP report entitled "Environmental Cooperation for Peace-building : Addressing the role of natural resources in conflict and peace building" indicates that the squandering of natural wealth, which often lies at the root of the conflict, is accompanied by a serious escalation of tension, which ultimately leads to the total loss of these resources. The "curse of resources" thus causes harmful effects for all the parties concerned. It follows that the rational management of conflicts will certainly spare the areas of tension further losses and damages that may extend to future generations.

While the literature on sustainable development indicates that development is tightly linked to peace and justice, the current realities in the Arab World indicate that these two objective prerequisites of

sustainable development are lacking in nearly a quarter of Arab countries now and for years to come. Still worse, other countries are likely to witness a deterioration of their conditions, either because they are involved in the conflict or in its causes, or as a result of receiving millions of refugees and displaced persons. This will necessarily have negative effects on the patterns of exploitation of their scarce natural resources, and cause additional demographic and ecological disruptions.

Geographic, environmental and socio-political factors have had their impact on the Arab World, causing serious shifts in their development processes, and placing them in front of tremendous challenges. In fact, most Arab countries suffer from poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, with economic and political differences and disparities across these countries.

Moreover, the health risks, the frequent natural disasters, the escalation of tensions and conflicts, the proliferation of violent extremism and terrorism, and the resulting humanitarian crises, displacement and brain drain, are all factors that threaten to undermine development efforts and reforms made during the past decades. Other challenges confronting most Arab countries include the exhaustion and misuse of natural resources, environmental degradation, drought, desertification, land degradation, scarcity of pure water, and loss of biodiversity. Climate change is also a major challenge having adverse effects on the States' ability to achieve sustainable development.

It is clear, in light of the foregoing, that sustainable development in the Arab World is confronted with various challenges, chief among which are :

- Arab brain drain;*
- Low growth rates and high poverty rates;*
- Deteriorating economic conditions, rising unemployment, and inadequate economic development programs;*
- High population growth rates (with an annual increase by 3%);*

- *Limited resources and waste/misuse of natural and environmental resources;*
- *Wars and instability.*

Achieving sustainable development goals in the Arab region requires simultaneous advances in the economic, social and environmental fields. These are, in fact, integrated, inter-related and indivisible fields that are necessary for the promotion of Arab societies.

The current situation in the Arab World also requires identifying the priorities of joint Arab action and establishing an integrated Arab strategy that aims at :

- *Improving the living, economic, social and health conditions of Arab citizens;*
- *Achieving peace and security on fair and equitable terms;*
- *Guaranteeing respect for human rights;*
- *Defusing tensions;*
- *Preserving natural resources (including water, forests and energy) and optimizing the management thereof;*
- *Protecting biodiversity and creating natural reserves;*
- *Combating pollution and desertification;*
- *Promoting safe waste management;*
- *Promoting sustainable farming;*
- *Preserving, developing and rationalizing the use of renewable energies, and curbing their negative effects;*
- *Combating illiteracy, developing educational methods, and enhancing scientific and technical research, in line with the requirements of SDG implementation.*

It should be underlined, in the same context, that the sector of higher education and scientific research is of extreme importance for achieving development. This sector is indeed the cornerstone for

establishing sustainable, knowledge-based economies and for creating knowledge societies capable of meeting the challenges of the future.

It is for that reason that developed countries have increased the volume of expenditure on research and development in the public and private sectors. China, for example, spends \$300 billion annually on research, and the USA \$450 billion. China's expenditures in this field are expected to exceed Europe's expenditures by 2018, and the USA's by 2022.

In the Arab World, however, the volume of expenditure on scientific research is still far from the global average. The annual per capita expenditure on scientific research does not exceed \$14 in the Arab World, compared to \$1200 in Europe.

This discrepancy has its impact in terms of scientific production. In 2012, nearly 2,945,000 scientific research works were published worldwide, of which only 38,500 were produced in the Arab World.

This low scientific production is attributable to the fact that research centers and institutions and the outputs of scientific research are not linked to funding institutions and to the industrial, productive and service sectors. Theoretical and applied research works are on the shelves of faculties and research centers, with little benefit drawn from them. The problem is not that scientific research or universities or research centers in the Arab World are lacking. It rather lies in the fact that little practical use is made of these institutions and of the research they produce.

It is this very factor that is pushing many Arab scholars and researchers to move to foreign countries where they are offered the necessary means to deepen their research, and where their research outputs are given all due consideration and are best benefited from. Currently, 54% of Arab students studying abroad do not return to their homelands.

Once again, the question has to do with education, both as one of the factors behind the crisis, given its inability to deepen environmental awareness, to rationalize patterns of consumption, and to convert

moral values into rational behaviors, or as one of the keys to the solution, provided that this education is inspiring and enlightening, and that it instills the values of love and coexistence, and allows people to achieve self-reconciliation as well as to guarantee a better future for future generations.

Urgent priorities

- *Establish a legislative and research system in atomic energy and radiation techniques and in their peaceful applications, with a view to improving the living standards of Arab peoples in terms of pollution reduction and prevention;*
- *Direct scientific research toward benefiting from new and renewable energy sources (solar, wind and wave energy), and narrow the energy gap in Arab countries;*
- *Implement programs to alleviate and adapt to the impact of climate change, to monitor desertification, and to rehabilitate degraded lands;*
- *Integrate the environmental dimension within national development plans and within educational curricula;*
- *Develop and upgrade Arab capacities in fighting and adapting to climate change;*
- *Develop Arab capacities in the management of coastal zones and marine environment, and create more marine reserves;*
- *Strengthen Arab efforts in terms of cooperation and networking with States and with regional and international organizations, and mobilize Arab and international resources to serve sustainable development goals;*
- *Develop post-graduate study programs, increase the number of Arab graduates in water resources management disciplines, and create national observatories in this field to issue periodic reports;*
- *Strengthen Arab sensitization efforts with regard to epidemics and contagious diseases;*

- *Develop post-graduate study programs and agricultural training programs, enhance farming guidance in coordination with research centers, and establish more technical incubators in the fields of agriculture, livestock and fisheries;*
- *Promote the use of modern techniques in monitoring drought, desertification, and land degradation;*
- *Strengthen Arab efforts to fight overfishing and illegal fishing;*
- *Support awareness programs for sustainable management (fight against deforestation, forest restoration...etc.);*
- *Establish an Arab strategy to fight desertification and to protect biodiversity and agricultural lands.*