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# 'Arab Spring' shows need for broader, greener development, says Human Development Report

**Copenhagen, 2 November 2011**—Achieving truly sustainable development in the Arab states will require bolder action on internal inequalities and environmental hazards, says the 2011 Human Development Report, released here today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



The 2011 Report—titled *Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All*—calls for broader efforts to foster equitable human development by reducing gender imbalances and expanding opportunities for those among the countries' marginalized communities.

It also confronts climate challenges with calls for new funding sources to help pay for balanced development and a shift to renewable energy.

“Investments that improve equity—in access, for example, to renewable energy, water and sanitation, and reproductive healthcare—could advance both sustainability and human development,” UNDP Administrator Helen Clark wrote in the Report's foreword.

## Divergent Patterns of Human Development

Arab countries have made steady progress over 40 years in income, education and healthcare as measured by the Report's Human Development Index (HDI), an annual rankings of achievement in health, education and income.

Oman, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco are all among the top 10 HDI performers, while Libya was among the leading 10 countries in non-income HDI achievement since 1970.

However, the overall HDI shows Arab States marked by divergent patterns of human development, with the United Arab Emirates (#30), Qatar (#37) and Bahrain (#42) all ranking in the top quarter of nations while three—Sudan (#169), Djibouti (#165) and Yemen (#154)—are in the lowest.

The 2011 HDI covers a record 187 nations and territories, including 19 Arab states and the occupied Palestinian territory.

In sharp contrast to other developing regions, HDI growth among Arab nations has largely taken place under centralized control.

But with the “Arab Spring” opening new opportunities for more inclusive governance, the Report says, in 2011 this “Arab democracy paradox” seemed to be coming to a sudden end,

opening the door to a much fuller realization of people's freedoms and capabilities throughout the region.”

### **Gender and Generational Inequalities**

The Report also notes that human development advances in the Arab region are at risk from widespread gender and generational inequalities—which are at the heart of grassroots discontent in many Arab countries.

Major ecological challenges—including polluted cities, spoiled land and severe water shortages—could worsen expected hardships associated with climate change, the Report argues.

The “Arab Spring” exposed wide generational and gender gaps: Half the population in Arab States is under 25, and youth unemployment rates largely exceed the global average, the Report notes.

In Egypt, where street demonstrations forced a change in government in early 2011 and sustained pressure on interim leaders continues, some 25 percent of college graduates cannot find full-time jobs. In Tunisia, whose protesters inspired the “Arab Spring”, the figure rises to 30 percent, says the Report.

Despite high economic performance in several Arab States, the region lags behind other areas in empowering women.

Despite progress in recent years, women in Arab countries are especially affected by unequal labour force participation, around half the global average, and low educational attainment, the Report says.

Using the Report's Gender Inequality Index (GII), introduced in 2010 to analyze labour force and political participation, educational achievement and reproductive rights, Yemen ranks as the world's most unequal country, ranked at #146.

Saudi Arabia (#135) and Sudan (#128) also perform among the least equitable nations from a gender perspective. At the other end of the scale, the United Arab Emirates (#38) leads the region's gender equality due to health and educational factors, followed by Bahrain (#44) and Tunisia (#45).

### **Multi-layered Environmental Challenges**

Countries of the region uniformly face a host of environmental challenges that merit priority attention, according to the Report.

The Arab region is the world's most arid, and water problems are paramount in many areas, affecting more than 60 percent of the region's extreme poor.

The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia all consume water at many times the sustainable rates, the HDI indicates, while Jordan and Syria threaten to exhaust their renewable resources—heightening tensions within the countries and with neighbours.

Using the results of the HDI's global public surveys on the environment, the Arab states rank just above sub-Saharan Africa—the world's poorest by HDI measurements—in public dissatisfaction with water quality, and 55 percent of Iraqis reported being unhappy with their water supply.

The Report warns that expanding deserts, diminished resources and other anticipated effects of global climate change could sharpen existing hardships facing Arab states, home to the highest shares of people living on land that cannot be productively cultivated (25 percent of the population), ahead of sub-Saharan Africa (22 percent).

In Sudan and Morocco, nearly 40 percent of the people live on degraded land—four times the global average—seriously affecting their long-term ability to meet their food needs.

Arab states have the greatest urban pollution of all regions and the world's highest dependency on fossil fuels, according to HDI measurements.

Qatar leads the world in per-person CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait, four of the five top CO<sub>2</sub> polluters are in the Gulf (Trinidad and Tobago is second), although these values reflect consumption as well as production of energy which is consumed in other countries.

Qatar's emissions of greenhouse gases per capita are nine times the global average. Sudan and Iraq have some of the world's most extreme levels of urban pollution, and HDI surveys show that people in Arab nations are among the least satisfied with air quality.

The Report notes that development progress does not have to be fuelled by high carbon emissions. Norway's per-capita carbon dioxide emissions (11 tonnes) are less than a third those of the United Arab Emirates (35 tonnes), although both have high incomes.

The Report's recommendations strongly urge a global energy initiative to provide electricity to some 1.5 billion people who are off the grid. It argues for expanded use of solar, wind and other renewable energies beyond the G20 nations, which account for global 90 percent of clean-energy investments.

For example, with ample sunshine and coastal breezes, several Arab countries were recognized by the Report for embracing such alternatives—though they still account for barely 11 percent of primary energy supply, less than half the world average.

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**ABOUT THIS REPORT:** The annual Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme. For free downloads of the 2011 Human Development Report in ten languages, plus additional reference materials on its indices and specific regional implications, please visit: <http://hdr.undp.org>.

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