

A global index to measures the state of knowledge in 131 countries

As part of the Knowledge Summit in Dubai, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF) launched the first edition of the Global Knowledge Index (GKI). The GKI 2017 is a unique initiative that measures the performance of 131 countries in the creation and dissemination of knowledge across different sectors.



According to the Index, Switzerland is the best-performing country in the world with a total score of 71.8 out of 100, followed by Singapore (69.5), Finland (68.5), Sweden (68.3), the Netherlands (68) and the United States of America (67.2). In the Arab region, the first country is the United Arab Emirates, which ranks 25th in the aggregated index and 2nd in the economy index. Some of the notable results in the Index are the Philippines ranking 4th and Azerbaijan 11th at the global level in the Technical Vocational Education and Training Index.

The index considers knowledge as a multidimensional concept, which is not only confined to the information and technology sector, but embraces all aspects of human life, including cultural, social and economic activities. One of the main findings of the GKI is that it statistically confirms the correlation between knowledge and development, which are interrelated and mutually influenced. Mr. Michael O'Neill, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy, noted during presentation of the GKI that "access to and availability of such data is important to design evidence-based policies that will be effective to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals".

His Excellency Jamal bin Huwareb, MBRF Chief Executive Officer, stressed that "based on the results of the index, governments should invest in and promote knowledge which is key to their progress and development".

The GKI is a composite index structured around seven sectoral indices, namely Pre-University Education; Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET); Higher Education; Research, Development and Innovation (RDI); Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Economy; and General Enabling Environment. It brings together 133 variables from the most reliable and updated international data sources.

The Global Knowledge Index is produced by the Arab Knowledge Project, a partnership initiative between UNDP and MBRF, supported by a core team of authors, and an advisory board with leading international experts. The development of the Global Knowledge Index builds on the work of the project over the past ten years which led to remarkable results, including the Arab Knowledge Report, the Arab Knowledge and Reading indices, and the cutting-edge Knowledge4All e-portal and mobile application.

According to Dr. Hany Torky, Chief Technical Adviser of project, “the GKI aspires to include more countries in future editions and become a key reference for policymakers and stakeholders to promote knowledge-based development”.

Second Regional Workshop on Transport and Trade Facilitation to strengthen Arab Economic Integration

With the objective of supporting Jordan and Arab Countries to implement the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA) and to accelerate economic reforms, the 2nd Regional Workshop on Transport and Trade Facilitation was held under the patronage of the Minister of Transport of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, with support of UNDP.



The event was attended by more than 120 representatives from Ministries of Trade, Transport, Customs administrations and various governmental trade-related agencies from Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, as well as from the business community. The workshop was a great opportunity to share and discuss international and regional knowledge and best practice on how to establish trade/transport corridors, National Single Windows and Customs automation as concrete trade facilitation measures. This exchange was enriched by the presence of experts from the World Customs Organization (WCO) and from international private and public entities (e.g. Vietnam, Indonesia and the Netherlands).

H.E. Eng. Jamil Ali Mujahed, Minister of Transport, encouraging participants to discuss solutions to the low intra-Arab trade and to the different challenges that hinder trade in the region, while reiterating the importance to promote multilateral collaboration among Arab countries toward better connectivity. In this regard, His Excellency welcomed the project “Strengthening Arab Economic Integration for Sustainable Development” funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and implemented by UNDP, to support Arab countries in the coming years and acknowledged the positive results of the support already provided. Different Jordan’s governmental agencies, such as the Customs Department, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Supply, and the Ministry of Transport illustrated during the workshop examples of concrete assistance by UNDP since 2014, which resulted in achievements in the development of Single Windows, in strengthening functions of the National Committee on Transport and Trade Facilitation, and in the enhancement of customs operations.

“We need to remind ourselves that trade and transport are key change agents and have the potential to fight poverty and create jobs opportunities” underscored H.E. Erik Ullenhag in his opening remarks. He highlighted the significant potential of Arab economic cooperation to contribute to more stability, peace, security, prosperity and gender equality in the region. The Ambassador also commended the progress achieved in the development of National Single Windows and accreditation activities under ARAC (Arab Regional Accreditation Cooperation) towards more integration of Arab countries into the global economy. These perspectives were echoed further by Mr. Khaled Abdelshafi who pointed out the potential of trade in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in combating poverty. He also focused on the important role of public-private partnerships, which amplify impacts of trade facilitation and inclusive growth.

Recommendations emerging from policy makers and private sector representatives during the workshop will help harmonize national procedures across the region while taking into account the interests of the different countries and businesses.

Fifty youth visualize what it takes to have a better Arab region by 2030

The Arab Development Portal (ADP) organized the first Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Data Dive Camp in the Arab Region gathering in Lebanon 25 young women and 25 young men from 14 Arab countries to produce audio-visual products inspired from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The participants of this Hackathon entitled “Visualize 2030” formed 21 groups/individuals around different priority areas, such as food security, education, economic development, peace, water, health, etc.



Over five days, these young brilliant minds were assisted in producing their final products and provided with on-site training by ten trainers on web development, coding, graphic design, animation, statistical analysis and visualization. The participants were selected from an initial group of 240 applicants including 600 youth, who applied through an open call.

The Closing Ceremony took place on Monday, October 23rd, with the presence of Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Health in Lebanon, Ghassan Hasbani and representatives of various organizations and media outlets. Minister Hasbani listened to the participants' presentations and congratulated them: “there is depth to what you are doing. You have showed dedication and commitment in tackling the priorities you identified. This is the best way to achieve these ambitious goals.”

Throughout the Camp, the youth showed immense commitment and enthusiasm and worked up late to produce competitive and effective products. An independent evaluation committee of 6 members from the region selected the top 3:

- SuperMilk from Lebanon, who produced a video on the importance of breastfeeding;
- BrainMix from Iraq, who developed a website on enhancing education in Iraq;
- TechArmy from Algeria, who developed a website on industrial investment in Algeria.

The main objective of Visualize 2030 is to encourage the consumption of data in support of advocacy campaigns and innovative thinking around development priorities and to contribute to enhancing an informed public debate in the region. Given that youth make up a third of the population in the region, working with youth is an important channel to ensure wide engagement. This will eventually encourage critical thinking and public awareness.

Khaled Abdelshafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub emphasized the role UNDP plays in engaging youth in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda “Two thirds of the region's population is under the age of 30. Simple arithmetic indicates that it is the youth who will eventually become the decision-makers in 2030.”

On the importance of data, Jafar al-Mahdi from the OPEC Fund for International Development and

representing the Coordination Group of Arab, National and Regional Development Institutions (CG) who are generously supporting the ADP said “the Arab World needs reliable sources of data and people who see patterns in them to allow decision-makers make informed decisions for a better future. The Arab Development Portal is here to provide a platform to share and analyze this information.”

Farah Choucair, ADP Project Manager, said that “this is the first regional camp that brings together youth from diverse backgrounds to produce audio-visual products driven by facts and data on development issues. The Camp aims to establish an innovative space to stimulate an informed and responsible public debate around countries’ and region’s priorities. Youth were asked to visualize the trajectory of different issues concerning their countries by 2030 with the aim to encourage them to express their concerns especially those related to conflict, violence and societal polarization.

Women’s political participation improves governance and the protection of human rights

The Arab region ranks the second-lowest in the world in terms of women’s parliamentary representation. In seven of the 22 Arab states, women’s representation in parliament is lower than 10%. While these figures are discouraging, they can be reversed through measures put in place to strengthen women’s political representation and participation.

To advance this agenda, the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States organized -with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency- a consultation on 26-27 September in Amman bringing together different UN experts on gender and political processes. This initiative is a collaboration of two regional projects: Mosharaka, which works to foster the inclusive participation and effective contribution of Arab women, and the regional electoral project that works towards enhancing knowledge, awareness and capacity on electoral processes and regional cooperation among electoral stakeholders. Informed by a preparatory desk review developed by the Regional Hub, the meeting mainly aimed at exploring the nuances of factors that influence women’s political participation in the Arab States and at sharing examples of successful measures applied in some of these countries. Research has shown that women in the political sphere can have a positive influence on legislative reform, state service delivery, and the protection of human rights.

“There is established and growing evidence that women’s leadership in political decision-making improves governance and the rights of women. Women have demonstrated political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women’s caucuses and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of Gender Based Violence, protection of Human Rights, and introducing gender responsive laws” stressed Mr. Khaled Abdelshafi, Director of the UNDP Regional Hub for Arab States, during his opening remarks.

There is no single factor that hinders women’s political participation; the reasons are diverse and contextual. Women candidates are often disadvantaged by traditional practices, whereby support



by the parties and the well-to-do male candidates. In addition to limited financial provisions by political parties, women candidates also face social barriers, namely low public confidence in female legislators.

The 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation (A/RES/66/130) has encouraged member states to remove discriminatory practices that might hinder women's political participation. Temporary special measures (TSM) are an example of the mechanisms that could be introduced to address the gender gap in politics, as well as to promote women's representation in political institutions. One of the more common TSM forms is the quota. However, in the Arab region, only 12 countries have implemented quotas for female representation in parliament. In Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and Yemen proposals for quotas or other TSMs have been rejected. The introduction of temporary special measures has been strikingly effective in increasing the number of parliamentary seats for women. In Algeria, for example, a quota law passed in 2012 led to a surge in women's representation from 7.7% (2007) to 25.8% (2017), the highest level of women legislative representation in the Arab region. Likewise, in Saudi Arabia, following a royal order that reserved seats for women, women's participation rose from 0% to 20% (2013).

An increase in women's political representation may lead to women's active participation. Indeed, the empowerment of women can have transformative effects. Various measures and dedicated bodies, like women's caucuses or committees, are pioneering pathways for such transformations. In Sudan, women parliamentarians were able to lobby for an amendment to the electoral law that mandates a 25% quota for women in decision-making positions. In Tunisia, the National Constituent Assembly's higher female representation led to Article 48 on women's rights, which was supported by 85% of female deputies, compared to 51% of male deputies.

TSMs are not a comprehensive solution to women's representation, but rather one in a set of tools that should be utilized along with long-term campaigning support, electoral reform, and civic education.

As indicated by participants, the event was timely and provided them with new and solid ideas to take forward with the respective regional and national counterparts. The fruitful exchanges and the findings of the discussion will be used to inform the preparation of a manual to guide the work of UN agencies and practitioners in the region towards increased women's political participation.

Arab trade integration key to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

As world leaders focused on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the UN General Assembly, the UNDP-SIDA working group met for the second time in Cairo to identify ways to leverage trade to make SDGs a reality in the Arab States. Technical experts, academia, representatives from national and regional institutions and from UN agencies gathered in September 18-20 to analyze the potential of trade in global value chain, trade facilitation and trade in agricultural products.

The group underlined that trade has significant potential to contribute to the achievement of SDGs in the Arab countries. As expressed by Mr. Peter Cederblad, Counsellor to the Swedish Embassy in Egypt, *"The only way to fulfill the potential of trade to achieve sustainable development is*



through regional collaboration of local actors and institutions". This direction is in line with UNDP's regional activities that capitalize on regional cooperation to promote development and fight poverty, thereby contributing to SDG 1 and SDG 2. Economic and trade integration in the region can also play a key role to build resilience of communities, and economically empower women and youth.

To support this effort, the working group is tasked with the analysis of high value-added sectors and the design of indicators that explain the contribution that trade would generate to support the implementation of the SDGs. The findings emerging from this work will complement efforts by Arab policy makers in the formulation of new strategies towards deepened Arab economic integration and development of related evidence-based policies.

Ms. Rima Al Khatib, Chair of the Working Group and Vice-Director of the Central Bank of Lebanon, stressed the importance to *"move from theoretical considerations to practical recommendations that could tangibly feed the policy-making process"*. To that end, a series of policy recommendations are being prepared. Dr. Khalid Wali, Deputy Director, representing the Head of Economic Sector of the League of Arab States expressed confidence in the possibility to implement these recommendations in the coming years in collaboration with Members.

According to an initial assessment, several countries in the region have not yet integrated trade-related components and activities into their national plans to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The analysis conducted by the working group illustrated the significant contribution that trade can bring to regional stability and prosperity, as well as to a more inclusive business environment for greater participation of women and youth. In this process, it is imperative to place efforts to further engage the private sector, including startups and SMEs, which can be the real engine for growth. This engagement goes hand in hand with the need to strengthen good governance and transparency in the Arab States region, as prerequisite to increased private sector investment.

Mr. Alexander Atarodi, Senior Program Manager at the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), expressed his appreciation for the work of the group and its potential: *"this platform for discussion is exactly what we believe is needed for the development of the region, and it gives hope in terms of ownership and sustainability. We look forward to the commitment of regional and national institutions in taking the recommendations forward, including dealing with challenges that restrain economic progress. Regional economic integration has significant potential that can be harnessed only through strong political determination"*.