

The Arab gender gap in the new millennium

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Accepted 7 September, 2015

ABSTRACT

By the year 2012, the Arab countries suffered from a serious gender gap ranged between 36 and 50%. This wide gender gap is due to several factors that reflected the internal and external milieus. The Arab states succeeded in the process of narrowing down the gap in the health and education spheres, but they obviously failed to do so in the economic and political empowerment. While the economic gender gap reached its peak in the case of Yemen with 49.5%, the lowest women political empowerments (0%) were recorded by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, respectively. In order to describe and analyze the Arab gender gap in the twenty-first century, two independent variables were examined, namely: human development and women empowerment. Theoretically, the gender gap is narrowed down to the maximum by the most human developed countries. But, the data of Human Development Reports (HDRs) and Gender Gap Reports (GGRs) showed that the Arab gender gap is similar in magnitude; therefore, further statistical analysis was required. Statistical analysis of HDRs and GGRs for the year 2012 demonstrated that the Arab Gender Gap (AGG) is more influenced by the level of women empowerment in human development process; thus, the HDIs affected the Gender Gap Index (GGIs) through an intervening variable, namely the Gender Inequality Index (GIIs). Consequently, the Arab states that achieved very high or just high Human Development Index (HDIs) were not necessarily treated women and men equally, especially in the economic and political areas, e.g., Qatar and Saudi Arabia. But, the Arab countries, which exhibited low or medium levels of HDIs and considerable scores of GIIs, succeeded in the process of narrowing down the GGIs to a degree that matched generally the Arab highly or very highly human developed states, e.g., Jordan and Mauritania. Regarding the future of AGG, business as usual scenario is expected to continue, which mean that the Arab states will not be able to change the negative into positive aspects, and shift the threats into opportunities in the near future.

Keywords: Arab countries, Arab gender gap, gender gap index, human development index, gender inequality index.

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INTRODUCTION

Although the topic of the Arab “*gender gap*”; or lack of equality between women and men in the health, education, economic and political fields, is very significant for scholars, politicians and elites alike, review of the literature reveals that little attention and focus was given in this regard. Politically, the Arab decision makers avoid adopting serious legislations about equality between women and men in order to narrow down the gender gap effectively. Academically, Arab scholars’ contributions were modest by all means.¹ Furthermore, elites, media

and the public avoid involvement in this topic, due to its sensitivity some times, and because of lacking the freedom of speech some other times.

To begin with, it is fair to indicate that the AGG is currently better off than it was fifty years ago; therefore, most Arab countries succeeded largely in the process of narrowing down the gender gap, particularly in health and

¹ - Review of the literature reveals that there was more focus on Arab women economic and political empowerment, see for example: (Benstead, et. al., 2012,

and de Miguel, 2013) The focus of Benstead, et. al. and de Miguel was on the political empowerment in selected Arab countries; therefore, this study will avoid the critics of case study method on the one hand, and the emphasis on certain dimension of gender gap, e.g., political empowerment *per ce* on the other hand.

education fields.² Obviously, Arab women have longer life compared with the early years of political independence. Thus, the average age of contemporary Arab women exceeds seventy years compared with less than fifty years in the 1950s.³ Furthermore, the level of education has improved quantitatively and qualitatively in the meantime. But, the available data indicated that the levels Arab women empowerment in the economic and political areas did not match their achievements in the health and education fields.

Here, a legitimate question might be asked by many scholars and politicians alike: *what has being achieved by the Arab women in health and education fields could be spilled over to economic and political aspects?* In order to deal with this question and others, we should elaborate on the data and methodology of this study.

Data and Methodology

The focus of this study is to describe and analyze the process of AGG in the twenty-first century in a comparative manner that take into consideration the surrounding internal and external environments that reflect political, economic, social and culture on the state, regional and global levels.⁴ As far as the main questions of this study are concerned, they might be summarizing as follows: *firstly, what are the achievements of Arab women in the fields of human development?; secondly, what is the impact of the Arab "HDI" and "GII" upon the Arab "GGI"; and finally, what is the prospects of the Arab "GGI"?*

Since the aim of this study is to answer primarily the above stated questions; therefore, a survey of the relevant literature and data will be utilized. Accordingly, we posit the following hypothesis:⁵

While the high levels of human development achieved by Arab states are expected to lead to high levels of women empowerment, thus a high levels of empowerment achievement is expected to narrow down the Arab

² - The UNDP reports indicating that the Arab world achieved noticeable progress in the field of women empowerment during the new millennium, and for more details in this regard see for example: "Gender Inequality, Chapter 5" in *Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries*, UNDP, available at this link:

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Humanity%20Divided/HumanityDivided_Ch5_low.pdf>

³ - According to the HDR (2013), the average age for Arabs, except Mauritania (58.9), Yemen (65.9), Djibouti (58.3), Comoros (61.5) and Sudan (61.8), exceeded seventy years. The highest averages recorded by high human developed countries, e.g., Qatar (78 years) and UAE (76.7 years). However, the average age of Arab women is higher than the average age of Arab men with couple of years or more than that. On the regional level, the average age of Arabs exceeded in 2012 (71 years) the global average (70.1 years) as a whole. For more details, see (the HDR, 2013: 142-147)

⁴ - In order to avoid the critics, this study adopts a strategy that combine qualitative and quantitative techniques, and for more details on that see for example: Cook and Reichardt (1979).

⁵ - In order to examine the validity of this hypothesis, this study will adopt the cross-sectional correlational design, "in which all measurement are taken at one point in time." (for more details, see for example: Spector, 1985: 32-36)

gender gap.

Obviously, this study deals with human development achieved by Arab states in the new millennium as independent variable,⁶ the empowerment of Arab women in fields of human development as intervening variables, and the Arab gender gap as dependent variable. Accordingly, this study will be divided into the following sections:⁷

- i) The Arab Human Development Index in the New Millennium,
- ii) The Arab Gender Inequality Index in the 2000s,
- iii) The Arab Gender Gap Index in the Twenty-First Century,
- iv) The Impact of Arab HDI and GII upon the GGI.
- v) The prospects of the Arab gender gap
- vi) Conclusion: results and recommendations

THE ARAB HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Review of the literature reveals that the concept of development is no longer limited in its meaning to economic growth and economic development; thus, the UNDP extended its meaning since 1990 when the first HDR was published.⁸ So the focus of UNDP becomes more concerned with human development rather than economic growth per se. The gross domestic product "GDP" per capita remained, however, an essential element for the concept of human development (HDR, 1990).

As defined by the UNDP, human development simply means: "*a process of enlarging people's choices*" (HDR, 2013:11). In order to enlarge people's choices, three conditions are required: people have to live a long and healthy life, to acquire better knowledge and finally to have higher levels of GDP per capita or a decent standard of living (HDR, 2013: 36). Accordingly, when these main three conditions are not available, many other

⁶ - While the Human Development Reports (2000 to 2013) represent data on all Arab countries, it is obvious that the Gender Gap Reports (2006 to 2012) include data only on around two thirds of the Arab states namely: United Arab Emirates "UAE", Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt and Yemen. So, for methodological reasons the focus of this study will be only on those Arab countries that their data are available on both reports. Thus, Libya, Sudan, Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Iraq and Palestine were excluded by this study for methodological reasons.

⁷ - As far as the data is concerned, this study depends on two main sources namely are: the HDRs that issued for the first time by the United Nations Development Program "UNDP" in 1990, and the GGRs that issued also for the first time by the World Economic Forum "WEF" in 2006. Since the title of this study is "The Arab Gender Gap in the New Millennium"; thus, the focus will be generally on data that reflect the years, 2000-2013. Both reports are available "free downloads" on these links: <<http://www.hdr.undp.org>> and <<http://www.weforum.org>>

⁸ - Boserup (1970 and 1993) early writing focused on the importance of women role in development process; so she criticized the discrimination against women in traditional societies that depend on agriculture.

choices and efforts to improve the quality of life will not lead to achieve the ultimate goal of human development.⁹

Furthermore, the UNDP identified four main components that are required for the success of any human development process, namely:¹⁰

- i) **Equality**, which means an equal access to opportunities; therefore, competitive markets and equal competitors are precondition for the achievement of human development;
- ii) **Productivity**, which means the focus on the quantity and quality aspects of economic growth; thus productivity is not restricted in the material aspects any longer;
- iii) **Sustainability**, which means the rights of future generations in a bitter life; so achieving economic development should not involve the risk of polluting the environment that definitely will affect the life of future generations;
- iv) **Empowerment**, which means an equal participation of women in the process of human development; thus the achievement of a better life becomes a reality rather than a mere slogan.

As far as the achievements of the Arab states are concerned in this regard, the UNDP developed the "HDI" that measures the progress of human development process annually.¹¹ A primarily look on the HDR of 2013 demonstrates that different levels of human development are achieved by Arab countries. For example, while Qatar and UAE are the only Arab states that achieved *very high* levels of human development; another five Arab states, namely Mauritania, Yemen, Djibouti, Comoros and Sudan are classified as the *lowest* human developed countries on the global level. The rest of Arab states are either classified as *high* human developed countries (e.g., Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Lebanon, Oman, Algeria and Tunisia), or *medium* human developed states, (e.g., Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Morocco and Iraq)¹²

Obviously, around one half of the Arab states (45.5%) are classified either as *very high* or *high* human developed countries. Somalia, which suffers from civil war and political instability since the last century, has no rank in this regard. In short, most of the Arab countries classified either as medium or high human developed countries.

⁹ - Obviously, the concept of human development reflects two aspects: developing human capabilities and the rationalization of these developed capabilities for productive, leisure and other purposes as well.

¹⁰ - for more details on this, you may visit the website of the UNDP at this link: <http://www.undp.org/sa/sa/index>

¹¹ - According to the HDRs, the components of human development index reflect four factors as follows: life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling and gross national income per capita.

¹² - For more details in this regard, you may check Human development Reports. (New York: UNDP, different issues from the years, 1990 to 2015). They are available (free downloads) on this link: www.undp.org/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human-development-report-1990-2013

Statistically, further investigation of the available data showed that the mean of Arab HDIs (0.696) reflected generally a medium level of human development. If we add the data concerned the five Arab countries that excluded from the analysis, the average mean of Arab HDIs will decrease into (0.652). In both cases, the average mean of Arab HDIs is very closer to the global standard (0.694).

Furthermore, the data of Table 1 showed that the value of standard deviation reached 0.1158, which indicated that there are Arab countries above and below the average mean as a whole. In short, the Arab HDIs on the macro level reflected generally the average global level, which includes many underdeveloped countries, e.g., sub-Saharan African states. Nevertheless, if we examined the data of Table 1 on the micro-level, a different conclusion might be reached; thus, one might say that the Arab states that were included into the analysis of this study split in fact into two sub-groups. While eleven Arab countries exceeded the mean of Arab HDIs (0.652), four other exhibited lower records. The split around the mean of Arab HDIs is clearer when we deal with Arab world as a whole; therefore, while the average mean of twelve Arab states exceeded (0.652), the other ten states that represent the second sub-group recorded lower means.

THE ARAB GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX IN THE 2000S

The data of HDRs emphasis that, higher levels of human development led to higher levels of women empowerment¹³ in the developed world; therefore, one might assume that the Arab states with very high and high human development indexes are more capable of achieving higher levels of empowerment, e. g., Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Consequently, a further investigation in this regard is required.

According to HDR (2013:141), women non-empowerment or "GII", is "an experimental composite measure of inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market."¹⁴ The GII is

¹³ - The terms women non-empowerment and "GII" used exchangeably in this study, and for more details see HDR 2013. According to the HDR 2013, p. 159: "GII": is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. See Technical note 3 at http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2013_En_technotes.pdf, for details on how the Gender Inequality Index is calculated.

¹⁴ -Linda Mayoux identified the term empowerment as: "a multidimensional and interlinked process of change in power relations [in four sub-groups]:

- power within: enabling women to articulate their own aspirations and strategies for change;
- power to: enabling women to develop the necessary skills and access the necessary resources to achieve their aspirations;

designed to provide “empirical foundations for policy analysis and advocacy efforts”. Thus, high value of GII indicates high inequality between women and men.¹⁵

Further review of the literatures reveals that various environmental factors handicapped women from empowerment. Simply, women rights are not given easily; therefore, they are imposed usually by non-governmental and global organizations, public opinion and other pressure groups that adhere to the issue of women empowerment. Some scholars as constraint and empowerment for women consider a sense of entitlement to leisure (Henderson and Dialeschki, 1991:51-65). Others identified the economic and political empowerment as the main challenges for contemporary women movement (Mayoux, nd).

As far as the Arab women empowerment in the health, education and economic spheres is concerned, the data of Table 1 and Figure 1 indicated the following facts:

1. The Arab GIIs reflect generally irregular pattern that the deviation between the highest and lowest scores reached over 50%. While the GII in the UAE reached 24.1%, the non-empowerment in Yemen exceed 74.7%. In short, the homogeneity of the Arab states on the national level, e.g., common language and history, did not match their accomplishment in the human development and women empowerment processes, due to several factors, e.g., oil and the influence of western culture. The wealthy Arab states spend generously on health and education on the one side, and their per capita incomes are considerably high on the other side. Thus, the data of Table 1 indicated that the most prosperous Arab countries, namely: UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman are the leading Arab countries in the field of women empowerment. Furthermore, Tunisia (26.1%), Algeria (39.1%) and Lebanon (43.3%) achieved considerable levels of women empowerment, due to their competitive economies, human and natural resources and French heritage.

2. The high achievement of Qatar and Saudi Arabia in human development did not match their accomplishments in the area of empowerment and gender gap. Consequently, the GIIs of Qatar and Saudi Arabia are exceptions to the rule; therefore, the GIIs

levels reached 54.6 and 68.2%, respectively.¹⁶ Nevertheless, both countries have been involved in political and economic reforms since the inception of the Arab Spring revolutions; thus, their GIIs are expected to decrease in the near future.¹⁷

3. Although Syria and Morocco have competitive economies, human and natural resources and French heritage, but their GIIs reached 55.1 and 44.4%, respectively. Lack of democracy, political instability and medium range of human development indexes were among the leading factors that affect negatively the women empowerment in both countries and others, e.g., Egypt (59%), Jordan (48%) and Mauritania (64.3%) (Table 1 and Figure 1).

4. Nevertheless, the lowest empowerment records on the Arab world level registered in Yemen, where the GII reached the peak with 75%, which means that the level of women empowerment in Yemen is the lowest not only on the Arab regional level (55.5%), but it is also on the global level as well (46.3%). Six other Arab countries exceeded the average GII that represented the world as a whole (46.3%); thus, the average of their GIIs is between one half and two thirds as follows: Saudi Arabia (68.2%), Mauritania (64.3%), Egypt (59%), Syria (55%), Qatar (54.6%) and Jordan (48.2%). Obviously, the levels of HDIs do not match necessarily the curve of GIIs. As shown in Figure 1, the high levels of HDIs in Qatar and Saudi Arabia did not match their high levels of women empowerment.

In short, the Arab states, as many other developing countries, are still considered traditional society that restricts the women empowerment, especially in the economic and political fields. Traditional Muslim women activists argue that the terms feminism and gender reflected generally negative aspects associated with western culture and real threat to Islamic identity (Elisabeth and Jørgensen, 2012: 2). The Arab spring revolutions, economic and political reforms and globalization are among the factors that will empower the Arab women in the near future. For example, Saudi Arabia is taking serious steps in this direction in order to cop up with other Arab and developing countries.¹⁸

• power with: enabling women to examine and articulate their collective interests, to organize to achieve them and to link with other women's and men's organizations for change;
 • power over: changing the underlying inequalities in power and resources which constrain women's aspirations and their ability to achieve them.”

The four sub-types of power relations that emphasized by Linda Mayoux reflected generally social, culture, economic and political aspects of life on the one hand, and micro and macro levels of analysis on the other hand.

¹⁵ - Non-empowerment of women or “GII” is an operational concept measures inequality between women and men in three fields as mentioned before, See in this regard the following link:

http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2013_En_technotes.pdf

¹⁶ - The gap of women empowerment in Saudi Arabia and Qatar reached 54.6% and 68.2%, respectively. This means that the ranks of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the field of women empowerment on the level of Arab world are the second and the sexist, respectively.

¹⁷ - for more details on the role of women in the Arab spring revolutions, see for example: (Merrill, 2014)

¹⁸ - In 2011, the Saudi ex-King Abdalla declared that women would be able to vote and run in the 2015 national elections. Furthermore, he appointed Saudi women in the parliament known as the Consultative Assembly. Qatar involved also in modernization process, and maintaining in the same time its Islamic identity See in this regard the following electronic links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_rights_in_Saudi_Arabia,

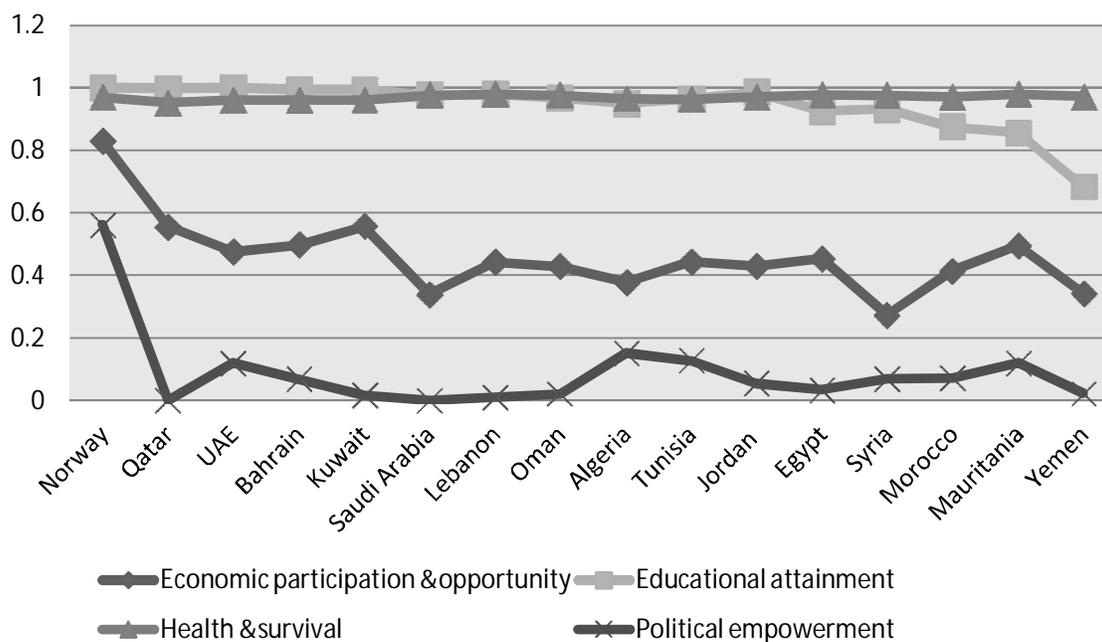
and

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_Qatar

Table 1. Arab states indexes in fields of human development and gender gap, 2012.

Countries	HDI	GII	GGI	Economic participation and opportunity	Educational attainment	Health and survival	Political empowerment
Norway	.955	.065	.840	.830	1.000	.970	.562
Qatar	.834	.546	.626	.556	.998	.952	.000
UAE	.818	.241	.639	.475	1.000	.961	.120
Bahrain	.796	.258	.630	.497	.995	.961	.067
Kuwait	.790	.274	.632	.557	.994	.961	.017
Saudi Arabia	.782	.682	.573	.340	.976	.976	.000
Lebanon	.745	.433	.603	.443	.980	.980	.010
Oman	.731	.340	.599	.428	.968	.976	.022
Algeria	.713	.391	.611	.378	.950	.966	.151
Tunisia*	.712	.261	.626	.444	.966	.964	.128
Jordan	.700	.482	.610	.430	.986	.971	.055
Egypt	.662	.590	.598	.454	.925	.977	.035
Syria	.648	.551	.563	.274	.931	.976	.070
Morocco	.591	.444	.583	.415	.874	.971	.072
Mauritania	.467	.643	.613	.496	.857	.980	.120
Yemen	.458	.747	.505	.342	.684	.973	.023

Data source: HDR, 2013; and GGRs, 2011 and 2012; * in Tunisia case data represent 2011.

**Figure 1.** Values of the component of Arab Gender Index in 2012.

THE ARAB GENDER GAP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Since gender equality is largely a human right case (Meetika, 2009:1); therefore, the Arab countries aim to narrow down the gender gap as much as possible.

Generally, no country in our contemporary world yet is able to close the gender gap completely; therefore, the equality between women and men in Norway reached 84%. However, the gender gap in the Arab world exceeded only 50%.

The term gender gap is linked to the feminist

movement and not necessarily to “feminist values”.¹⁹ Nevertheless, different scholars gave different definitions for the term gender gap;²⁰ thus, one can notice quantitative and qualitative aspects in this regard.²¹ Review of the literature reveals that scholars used different terms to refer to the role of women in politics; thus, while the term women reflect biological specie, feminism indicate to ideological dimension, and gender focus on cultural and social differences between women and men (Pettman, 1999; Hooper, 2000; Rosenbloom and Kravchuk, 2005:242). Nevertheless, this study will adopt the operational complex definition of the GGRs, which gave different values to the component of the GGIs.²²

Despite the complexity of measuring the GGI, the data of Table 1 and Figure 1 reflects recent available data on the Arab gender gap. The previous data will give us a primarily ideas on the issue of equality of Arab women and men in the new millennium. Nevertheless, the examination of the data in Table 1 and Figure 1 lead us to the following conclusions:

¹⁹ - In a distinguished study, Cook and Wilcox (1991: 1111-1122) concluded that: “feminism leads to feminist, not feminine values...[and]...the gender gap is due entirely to feminist women and [there is] a gender gap among feminist men and women , potentially feminist men and women , and non-feminist men and women.”

²⁰ - According to the Oxford Dictionary, the gender Gap as a noun means “the discrepancy in opportunities, status, attitudes, etc., between men and women.” Obviously, this definition explains the term gender gap in the simple way for the public; so it is not operational, comprehensive and precise. See in this regard, the following link: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>

²¹ - Economists, such as Galor and Weil (1996:374-386), linked gender gap to fertility and growth; therefore, they ignored the impact of political, educational and health factors upon the gender gap process.

²² - The GGRs identified four dimensions for the gender gap index, namely: economic participation and opportunity with five indicators; educational attainment with four indicators; health and survival with two elements; and finally political empowerment with four criteria. The total score of each component equal one, and their scores are divided as follows: (GGR, 212: 6)

1. The scores of economic participation and opportunity are divided as follows:

- i) Ratio: female labour force participation over male value (0.199)
- ii) Wage equality between women and men for similar work (converted to female-over-male ratio) (0.310)
- iii) Ratio: estimated female earned income over male value (0.221)
- iv) Ratio: female legislators, senior officials and managers over male value (0.149)
- v) Ratio: female professional and technical workers over male value (0.121)

2. The scores of educational attainment are assigned as follows:

- i) Ratio: female literacy rate over male value (0.191)
- ii) Ratio: female net primary level enrolment over male value (0.459)
- iii) Ratio: female net secondary level enrolment over male value (0.230)
- iv) Ratio: female gross tertiary enrolment over male value (0.121)

3. The scores of health and survival are classified as follows:

- i) Ratio: female healthy life expectancy over male value sex (0.307)
- ii) Ratio at birth (converted to female over male ratio) (0.693)

4. The scores of political empowerment are arranged as follows:

- i) Ratio: females with seats in parliament over male value (0.310)
- ii) Ratio: females at ministerial level over male value (0.247)
- iii) Ratio: number of years of a female head of state (last 50 years) over male value (0.443)

1. Health and survival is the component of gender gap that the Arab states achieved best records; thus, their scores exceeded 90%. The health of women and men is the first priority within the Arab countries; consequently, the Arab states almost achieved full equality in the health sector.

2. With the exception of Yemen (68.4%), Mauritania (85.7%) and Morocco (87.4%) the Arab gender gap in the area of educational attainment is less than 10%. The data of Table 1 showed that the UAE closed completely this gap. Furthermore, Qatar and Kuwait almost recorded full scores in this regard; thus, educational attainment gap did not exceed 0.02 and 0.06% in both countries, respectively. In short, by the year 2012 the Arab states achievements in the fields of health and education are very high, due to their public policies support and encouragement of women empowerment in this regards. Globalization also facilitated and supported the Arab countries plans regarding the empowerment of women, particularly in the fields of health and education.²³

3. The achievement of Arab countries in health and survival, and educational attainment did not match their accomplishment in economic participation and opportunity in general and political empowerment in particular. As far as the Arab economic gender gap is concerned, the data of this study demonstrate that only Kuwait, Qatar and UAE exhibited the highest scores; therefore, their GGIs reached 55.7, 49.7 and 47.5%, respectively. Due to instability and civil war, the Syrian score in economic participation and opportunity is the lowest, which mean the GGI reached only 27.4%.

4. The worst achievement by the Arab countries was in the area of political empowerment, where the scores of GGI ranged between zero and 15% only. Despite their achievement in health and educational attainment, the political empowerment gap reached 0% in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, respectively. Thus, the GGIs in this regard did not exceed: 15.1% in Algeria, 12.8% in Tunisia, 12% in UAE and Mauritania respectively, 7.2% in Morocco, 7% in Syria and 5.5% in Jordan. Traditional values, weak gender NGOs and lack of democracy are among the prominent factors that lied behind the widening Arab political gender gap in the year 2012.

THE IMPACT OF ARAB HDI AND GII UPON THE ARAB GGI

As we mentioned previously, the data of this study indicated that the developed countries, according to the HDRs and GGRs, achieved high levels of human

²³ - The UNDP plays a crucial role, especially in the needy Arab countries, through its efforts to encourage the Arab states to meet the ultimate goals of the new millennium in 2015.

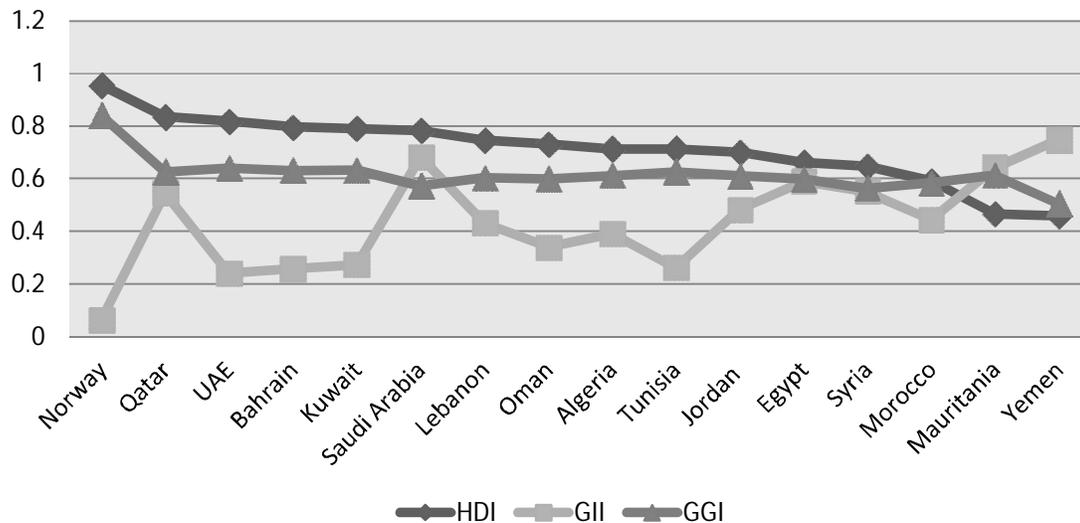


Figure 2. Values of Arab HDI, GI and Arab GGI in 2012.

development and women empowerment on the one hand, and considerable levels of equality between women and men on the other hand. We also raised a legitimate question regarding the application of this trend in the case of the Arab states. Logically, the Arab countries with high level of human development are expected to achieve high levels of women empowerment and equality with men in the health, education, economic and political fields.

The value of HDIs that achieved by developed countries were almost complete on the one hand, and they followed by high scores in the field of women empowerment (GII) on the other hand. For example, while the HDI of Norway reached (95.5%), its GI is very low (6.5%). Furthermore, the record of Norway's GGI (84%) is far from perfect, and thus it did not match necessarily its high scores in the areas of human development (95.5%) and women empowerment (93.5%). As we noticed earlier, Norway as well as other developed countries still far from closing the gender gap, especially in the area of political empowerment; therefore, their records in GGI is far from perfect.

Nevertheless, the differences of values between the GIIs and GGIs are more noticeable in the case of the Arab states compared with Norway and other developed countries. For example, Qatar and Saudi Arabia achieved high levels of HDIs on the one side, and lower levels of GIIs on the other side (Figure 2); therefore, one might conclude that the Qatari and Saudi human development indexes did not result necessarily in higher women empowerment as it was the case with the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait.²⁴

Furthermore, the Arab countries with low HDIs, e.g., Mauritania and Yemen, should have lower levels of empowerment and equality between women and men. But, the data of Figure 2 showed that the GI and GGI of Mauritania are better than that achieved by Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Although, Mauritania is considered a low human developed country by the UNDP, its GI and GGI are very considerable compared with Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the relationship between the GGIs, GIIs on the one hand, and HDIs on the other hand is not clear cut as the case with the developed countries; thus, further statistical analysis is required in this regard in order to describe and analyze any causal relationship among them, if they exist.

The data of Table 2 showed the minimum and maximum values achieved by the Arab states; the highest and lowest scores in HDIs, GIIs and GGIs are exhibited by the UAE and Yemen, respectively (Table 2 and Figure 2). According to Table 2, the UAE is a very human developed country that has achieved the highest level of women empowerment and equality, while Yemen is the opposite case. But, since most of the Arab countries achieved considerable levels of HDIs, their average mean (.696) is very close to the scores achieved by high human developed countries (HDIs >.700).

The correlations between HDI, GI and GGI (Table 3) are generally significant at 0.05 level. Table 3 shows that the process of Arab human development is followed by narrowing the gap (-0.66*) of Arab women empowerment (GIIs) on the one hand, and improving the level of

²⁴ - The range of HDIs, GIIs and GGIs is between 0 and 1; therefore, a perfect score is equal to one. According to HDR, 2013 and GGR, 2012, no country in the world achieved perfect scores in HDIs, GIIs and GGIs. While, Norway achieved for example the first rank of human development country in 2012

with a score of (0.955) or 95.5%, Netherland recorded in the same year the first rank in GIIs with a score of 0.045, which means the level of women empowerment reached 95.5%. Regarding the issue of equality between women and men, Iceland scored the highest value of GGI in 2012 with a score of 0.864, which mean the level of equality between women and men reached only 86.4%.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of study variables.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HDI	15	.458	.834	.69647	.115855
GII	15	.241	.747	.45887	.165031
GGI	15	.505	.639	.60073	.034439
Valid N (listwise)	15				

Table 3. Correlations between the three variables of the study.

		HDI	GII	GGI
HDI	Pearson correlation	1	-.600(*)	.645(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.018	.009
	N	15	15	15
GII	Pearson correlation	-.600(*)	1	-.732(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018		.002
	N	15	15	15
GGI	Pearson correlation	.645(**)	-.732(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.002	
	N	15	15	15

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Correlations between the GGI and GII when HDI is controlled.

Control variables		HDI	GGI	GII
HDI	GGI	Correlation	1.000	-.564
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.036
		df	0	12
GII	GII	Correlation	-.564	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.036	.
		df	12	0
GGI	HDI	Correlation	1.000	.378
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.182
		df	0	12
GGI	GGI	Correlation	.378	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.182	.
		df	12	0

a Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

equality (.645**) between the Arab women and men on the other hand. Furthermore, the previous data indicated at 0.05 level that the declining of the Arab GIIs accompanied by a negative HDI and GGI simultaneously. But, the data of Table 3 did not enable us to talk about the existence of a causal relationship between the GGI

on the one hand, and the HDI and GII on the other hand. In order to examine causal relationships among the three variables, Table 4 were developed. The data of Table 4 showed that the correlation between the HDI and GGI is weak (0.378) and insignificant at the 0.05 level (HDI = 0.182); so one might say that the Arab HDIs do

not affect necessarily the Arab GGIs. When we control the HDIs²⁵, the correlation between the GIIs and GGIs is negatively moderate (-0.564) and significant at the 0.05 level (0.036); thus, one might conclude that the Arab GIIs affected negatively the process of equality between women and men.²⁶ In short, more Arab women empowerment or involvement in the process of human development leads into more equality between the Arab women and men, and *vice versa*.

THE PROSPECTS OF THE ARAB GENDER GAP

Forecasting the AGG requires the diagnosis of the current circumstances. SWOT analysis is a useful tool to begin with; therefore, the focus will be on the internal and external environments. While the strength and weakness points reflected the dimension of internal environment, it is obvious that the opportunity and threats elements represented the external milieu. For methodological limitations, five points of each SWOT components (Cyber Blue – FRC 234, 2014) will be mentioned consecutively as follows: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths of the Arab gender gap

Despite the widening Arab gender gap in the new millennium, five positive points will be discussed briefly for methodological reasons, and they are:

1. The Arab countries scores in the health field, as we noticed, are considerably remarkable. The average of women age in most of the Arab countries is higher than the global average.
2. Educational achievements for contemporary Arab women is another positive aspect that cannot be ignored by politicians, commentators, NGOs and scholars.
3. Arab Spring revolutions in North Africa and Yemen resulted in spill over process of political and economic

²⁵ - The aim of science is not only to develop theories that explain observed phenomena, but it is also includes understanding, prediction and control. In order to examine the relationship between the GGI and the GII on the one hand, and the GGI and the HDI variables on the other hand, the HDI variable hold constant in the first case and the GII controlled in the second case. Thus, controlling the HDI and the GII variables literally examining the relationship between two instead of three variables simultaneously (Shively, 1980: 103-105).

²⁶ - Although the focus of this study was to examine the impact of HDI and GII upon the GGI, a further statistical analysis conducted. It demonstrates that the correlation between HDI and GII, when the GGI is controlled, is insignificant (0.398) and negatively weak (-0.245), which means that the HDIs of some Arab countries, e.g. Qatar and Saudi Arabia, did not follow necessarily by women empowerment, especially in the economic and political arenas. Further examination on the results of regression analysis showed that an increase in GGI by 1% leads to an increase in HDI by 0.322% (sig. = .182) and a decrease in the GII (sig. = .036) by -0.538%. Thus, while HDI leads to decline in the GII or more empowerment for Arab women, it is obviously that less GII resulted in narrowing the GGI.

reforms in most of the Arab countries during the years 2011 to 2015. The Arab women were main partners of revolutionary movements in the Arab Spring states; therefore, their political influence and empowerment improved considerably in many Arab countries (Bouziane et al., 2013) For example, the Libyan women legislative membership increased from 7% into 16.5% after the success of 17 February 2011 revolution.

4. Changing attitudes towards the issue of gender; thus, recent surveys support the increased role of women in political and economic spheres. The author for example conducts national survey in 2012, and fined out that most of the sample supported the involvement of Libyan women in the process of democratization.

5. There were many conference, workshops and seminars held in Arab countries that consider the women rights as human rights, and issued recommendations that support the increased role of women in politics and economics as well.

Weaknesses of the Arab gender gap

But, the previous positive elements of gender issue are faced also with negative aspects that we might summarize some of them as follows:

1. As we noticed earlier the Arab women lack noticeably the empowerment in the economic field, and the equality process in this regard might take longer time.
2. The Arab women were not better off in the area of political empowerment, and speculations in this regard are extremely pessimistic.
3. The Arab women lack considerably the strong willingness of changing the status quo for their interests; therefore, many of them biased towards manly States or masculinities (Hooper, 2000).
4. Women civil societies and NGOs suffer from organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness, due to several factors such as; legal difficulties, lack of awareness and continuous accommodation with the surrounding environment.
5. Social and cultural handicaps are also another negative aspect that delays the process of narrowing the gender gap process, e.g., whiter the Arab women as a housekeeper or an equal partner.

Opportunities of the Arab gender gap

If we moved from internal into external environment, it is obvious that the regional and global milieus reflect opportunities and challenges as well. As was the case with positive and negative aspects, we will focus only on five points as follows:

1. Globalization process reflects an opportunity that helps feminist movement to make women rights as human

rights. The advanced technology makes it easier for women voices to be heard everywhere; therefore, the gender issue is globalized effectively in the twenty first century.

2. Executing international and regional treaties and agreements by the Arab countries, e.g., convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women of 1979 will narrow the gender gap noticeably.

3. Moving from traditional into competitive economies will enable Arab women to gain new skills that increase their role in development; and thus, enhance their economic empowerment and narrowing down the AGG as a whole.

4. Global social transformation is expected to result in labor shortages, and Arab women with educational and economic empowerment might fill this gap.²⁷

5. Wide global and Arab public opinions support to women rights as human rights is another opportunity to narrow down the Arab GGIs.

Threats of the Arab gender gap.²⁸

As far as the challenges of narrowing down the Arab gender gap are concerned, five points will be mentioned in this sub-section as follows:

1. Global environment constrains that handicapped the empowerment of Arab women on the state and regional levels, especially in the economic and political fields, e.g., war against terrorism, human trafficking, and war against drugs are among factors that threaten the process of Arab women empowerment.

2. Meeting the millennium goals by the year 2015 generally, and meeting those goals regarding women particularly, is another serious challenge for the Arab world. Improving maternal health, reducing child mortality, achieving universal primary education and promote gender equality and empower women are among the prominent challenges for many Arab countries in the year 2015 and beyond.²⁹

3. Political Islam is another serious challenge for women movement that called for equality between women and men, especially in the economic and political arenas.

4. Continuing opposition for changing the image and status of Arab women from merely a wife house into a real productive human being.

²⁷ - for more details on points number two and three see: "Closing the Gender Gap: Challenges, Opportunities and the Future" International PCW Site at this link:

<http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/women-at-pwc/pwc-closing-the-gender-gap-film.jhtml>

²⁸ - The Human Development Report (2009) published by the UNDP in Arabic described and analyzed in details the threats that handicapped the efforts of achieving Arab human development in the new millennium, especially chapter four, which focused on the lack of private security for Arab women. See for more details, the AHDR, 2009: 79-98, available on this link: <http://www.hdr.undp.org/arabic>

²⁹ - for more details on the millennium goals 2015, you may contact the following link: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/stats.shtml>

5. The Arab women lack of private and personal security is a fifth factor that slows down the process of empowerment in the twenty first century. Early marriage, sexual harassment and rape are widespread phenomena in many Arab countries, particularly those states with medium and low level of HDIs.

From the previous SWOT analysis, three scenarios might be emphasized in this regard as follows:³⁰

Firstly, moderate scenario or the scenario of business as usual which assume the continuity of the Arab gender gap; therefore, the future in this case is a continuing process for the present time. The negative and threats regarding the Arab gender gap will continue to exist in the future as reported by the GGRs.³¹

Secondly, pessimistic scenario that assume future changes will effect negatively the Arab gender gap due to many factors, such as civil wars and spread of terrorism, the rise of political Islam, adopting public policies that widening the Arab gender gap, and the failure of Arab states to deal effectively with negative and threats aspects that might help in process of narrowing the AGG in the twenty-one century.

Thirdly, optimistic scenario that assume also future changes, but in favour of improving dramatically the Arab gender gap in the new millennium. In this scenario, the Arab states will succeed in the process of changing the negative aspects of internal environment into positive ones. Furthermore, the Arab countries will face successfully the threats that imposed by external milieu on the one hand, and will rationalize the available opportunities for the interest of women empowerment on the other hand.³²

CONCLUSION: RESULTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Arab countries, as well as other developing states, suffer from a noticeable gender gap, particularly in areas of economic and political empowerments. Although the data of GGRs emphasizes that no country in our contemporary world could close the GGI completely, it is obvious that the gender gap in the Arab world is much larger than that recorded by developed countries. According to the criteria that developed by the GGRs, the

³⁰ - See in this regard for example the literature of futurology (Kahn, 1975: 405-442)

³¹ - Sophie Bessis pointed out in her distinguished short study, "The issue of women is a barometer of the nature of the transitions underway in the Arab world." Nevertheless, her article supports the thesis of this scenario (Bessis, 2013: 267-269)

³² - Although the Arab Spring revolutions did not carry out its objective as the Arabs and the world community is expected, many factors indicate that the moderate scenario will persist for some times simply because building new democracies is very complicated and long processes. Developing positive attitudes towards the issue of gender equality is also require some time; so the new generations might change their attitudes in favor of more equality between women and men in this new millennium.

equality between women and men is still far away to be accomplished in the near future. Even some Arab countries, which exhibited very high levels of HDIs, e.g., Qatar and Saudi Arabia, recorded the highest political gender gap globally in the year 2012.

As far as the results of this study are concerned, one might summarize them in the following points:

1. The GGIs of wealthy and competitive Arab countries are generally higher than that recorded by low-income and non-competitive counterparts. The GGIs of the Arab countries that achieved high or very high human development are between 60 and 64%. Nevertheless, the GGIs of low human developed Arab countries reached its lowest score in the case of Yemen (50.5%).
2. Despite the common culture and history, the Arab countries classified into four sub-groups according to HDIs as follows: very high human developed group, high developed human countries, medium human developed states, and low human developed group.
3. High or very high human developed Arab states achieved considerable levels of women empowerment; therefore, the GIs of many Arab countries were moderate, e.g., UAE, Bahrain, Tunisia and Kuwait. However, high or very high human developed Arab countries do not lead necessarily into women empowerment, particularly in the political field, e.g., Qatar and Saudi Arabia.
4. Those Arab countries, which achieved high or very high human development, succeeded in the process of narrowing the GGIs, e.g., UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Tunisia, compared with those states that failed to do so, e.g., Yemen, Syria and Egypt.
5. Arab countries that achieved better scores of GIs were more capable of narrowing the GGIs, e.g., UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Tunisia.
6. Low human development does not lead necessarily into high level of gender gap, e.g., Mauritania achieved low level of human development, and moderate scores in women empowerment and gender gap in the meantime.
7. The economic and political components of GGIs are generally handicapped the Arab countries, as well as other developed and developing states, from narrowing or closing the gender gap process. However, the GGIs are better off in the developed countries compared with Arab and other developing nations.
8. Generally, the correlation between HDIs and GIs is strong and significant; therefore, most of the highly human developed Arab countries scored considerably in the area of women empowerment, e.g., UAE, Bahrain, Tunisia, Kuwait, Oman and Algeria.
9. The correlation between HDIs and GGIs is weak and insignificant; thus, the Arab countries exhibited similar scores of GGIs regardless of their achieved human development levels, e.g., the difference of GGIs between Yemeni (0.505) and UAE (0.639).
10. The correlation between GIs and GGIs is strong and significant; so the Arab states, e.g., UAE, Bahrain,

Tunisia, and Kuwait that succeeded in the process of women empowerment were capable of narrowing the GGIs to the minimum compared with their counterparts, e.g., Yemen.

11. As far as the future of Arab gender gap is concerned, evidences support the existence and continuation of business as usual scenario in the near future, due to civil wars, the rise of political Islam, the marginal roles of Arab women NGOs, and the Arab women lack of willingness to change the status quo for their interests.

12. The topic of the AGG requires further research and investigation, due to its importance. Time series analysis, empirical and social survey designs are among the available methods for describing and analyzing scientifically the process of AGG in the new millennium.

The findings of this study largely support the expectations underlying the impact of HDIs upon the Arab women empowerment (generally) on the one hand, and the effect of GIs upon the GGIs (especially) on the other hand. Thus, the higher levels of HDIs that achieved by Arab states led to lower levels of GIs, and the high levels of women empowerment resulted in narrowing down noticeably the Arab gender gap. But due to methodological limitation of this study, further researches in this regard are required in order to generalize the results on the one side, and theorizing about the gender gap in the Arab world and the globe as a whole on the other side.

As far as the policy recommendations of this study are concerned, one might mention these points:

1. Adopting public policies that narrow down the health and education gap to the lowest required level; therefore, the Arab countries can fulfill the objectives of the new millennium as planned by the UNDP program in 2015.
2. Develop policies that encourage women involvement in public and private sectors, e.g., financing small and medium women enterprises in order to narrow down the economic gender gap.
3. Encourage the process of political empowerment by issuing the necessary laws that respond to internal and external milieu.
4. Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of Arab women civil society organizations, thus they can decrease the gender gap of the early new millennium.
5. Support the efforts that encourage Arab women empowerment, especially in the economic and political spheres. Political elites and social media may play crucial roles in this regard (Arab social Media Report, 2011).

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Citation: Kashiem, M. A. A. (2015). The Arab gender gap in the new millennium. *Net Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(3): 77-88.
