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Mohammed bin Rashid
Al Maktoum Foundation



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Arab Knowledge Report 2009

Towards Productive Intercommunication for Knowledge





Arab Knowledge Report 2009

Towards Productive Intercommunication for Knowledge

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Foreword by the Chairman of the Board, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation

It gives me great pleasure to announce to you today the release of The Arab Knowledge Report 2009—Towards Productive Intercommunication for Knowledge, a fruit of the shared efforts of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme that lays the foundation of a strategic partnership that we hope will be both long lasting and of ongoing benefit for our Arab societies and their upcoming generations.

Given that analysis of the state of knowledge in the Arab homeland requires tireless effort and rigorous follow-up, this report can form no more than a first link in a continuing series of Arab Knowledge reports that will embody, from more than one perspective, the essential principles outlined by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, in his book *My Vision*, principles to which His Highness gave voice when he wrote, “I do wish for all my Arab brothers and sisters what I wish for my people of the UAE. I just want them to reach the same advanced levels achieved by developed countries. Moreover, I would like them to take control over their issues and proceed with accomplishing their goals, ambitions and aspirations”

The issuing of the Arab Knowledge reports falls within the framework of the more prominent initiative of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation—the largest development initiative of its kind in the region—which aims to establish and develop a comprehensive knowledge base through

the creation of a generation of future public and private sector leaders capable of seizing knowledge by the forelock and setting it to work on confronting the development challenges of their societies, while at the same time raising the standard of scholarly research and development, stimulating leadership in business, fostering innovation and creativity among youth, revitalizing the concept of productive culture, and strengthening ways of bringing different cultures closer together.

The Report now before us focuses on the organic relationship within the knowledge-society-development triad that is linked to modernisation, productive openness to both the inside and the outside, and all that contributes towards the strengthening of Arab human dignity. It views the current knowledge revolution as a point of entry capable of making development in the Arab homeland a reality. In the view of this report, knowledge, in both its enlightenment and developmental dimensions, is renaissance itself. It is also a road that requires a further sharpening of the tools of creative human intelligence in order to establish and reinforce the foundations of the knowledge economy in our region for the sake of the wellbeing and self-esteem of the Arab citizen.

The induction of knowledge concepts constitutes the cornerstone of any effective process of human development and as such makes a critical contribution to the escape from the vicious circles of poverty, unemployment, ignorance, and fear. It follows that the right to acquire, indigenise, and develop knowledge is beyond dispute.

This year's report may perhaps best be described as a thoroughgoing methodological and scholarly effort to study Arab knowledge in great detail, up to the point of its deployment in the service of the Arab individual. The aim is to furnish the Arab decision-maker, specialist, and citizen with a reference study that includes reliable indicators by which to measure the condition of knowledge in the Arab countries and thus assist with the development of plans and the assessment of performance and to kindle the spirit of competitiveness in a field in which this is of the essence.

The Report departs from the norm in formulating a daring proposed vision and work plan for the establishment of the knowledge society that embrace primary elements and required mechanisms likely to be of use in filling in the numerous gaps that dot the Arab knowledge landscape and in leading us through the portals of knowledge so that we may engage with its society and participate in its processes of production. The Report also opens for general discussion, critique, and review a proposed vision of work and action along three axes—the provision of enabling environments; the transfer, indigenisation and implantation of knowledge and then its deployment in the service of Arab human development.

The series of Arab Knowledge reports constitutes a cultural podium prepared by an elite of Arab specialists and intellectuals whose objective will be to ponder the state of Arab knowledge and suggest the methods most likely to succeed in

establishing the desired knowledge society. We may not all agree on what is to be found in this report. The goal, however, is to instigate constructive discussion that will lead to adoption and application of policies and programmes that will translate its insights from the realm of reporting to that of effective actions on behalf of Arab societies capable of bringing about their wellbeing and self-esteem.

This work of ours will neither be completed nor born fruit without the cooperation of all—governments, civil society, and specialists from different parts of the Arab homeland. From this perspective, I sincerely call on all involved, and indeed on all concerned parties, to peruse these reports and subject them to discussion, critique, and fruitful debate, with the express goal of creating the means of putting into practice, whether at an Arab regional or an individual country level, the ideas resulting from this interactive process.

It also gives me great pleasure, in this context, to express my thanks and appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Arab States and in particular the report team in Dubai, as well as to all those—thinkers, writers, editors, and technical personnel—who participated in bringing this report into being. I look forward to further fruitful collaboration to reinforce the foundations of the intellectual edifice of knowledge in this region and secure the mainstays of the human development to which the Arab world aspires.

**Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Chairman of the Board
Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation**

Foreword by the Regional Director, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States

With the publication of this first report on knowledge in the Arab region, the United Nations Development Programme/Regional Bureau for Arab States and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation inaugurate what may be considered one of the most ambitious and competent projects to build and reinforce the knowledge society in the Arab region and to implant there its epistemological, intellectual, and cultural principles, in all their dimensions. This report represents a first step in a strategic partnership, of which we are proud, between our development programme and that pioneering enlightenment foundation established at the initiative of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, and for which generous resources have been allocated.

While this report extends and goes deeper into the issues presented by the Arab Human Development Report 2003, which addressed the subject of knowledge as one of the most important of the three challenges facing the Arab region in addition to protection of freedoms and women empowerment; the co-publication of this series of reports on Arab knowledge demonstrates the harmoniousness and accord of the efforts of the United Nations Development Programme and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation, their shared dedication to a single goal, and the exalted nature of their mission and objective. All of these form a part of the range of regional and global effort in this field.

The diagnostic analysis contained in this first report on Arab knowledge shows that some progress has been made in the outward forms of knowledge in the Arab world. It has also made plain, however, the existence of numerous gaps that must be addressed, seriously and resolutely, if we wish to establish a society capable of producing knowledge. We endorse the Report's assumption that the ground lost by the Arabs in the knowledge field can be made up, provided, first, that the aspiration to do so is there, along with the political will, supported by the allocation of the resources needed to build the enabling environments and the institutions capable of nurturing progress in knowledge and the conversion of the gains achieved into means to realise comprehensive human development.

The Report presents a number of important analyses of the conditions of knowledge in the Arab region. We agree that these must be dealt with urgently. It expatiates on monitoring the situation of the most important pillars of the hoped-for knowledge society and dedicated special attention to knowledge capital, making clear in so doing the large discrepancy in capital acquired through education, not only among the Arab countries themselves but within each individual Arab state and between males and females, as well as between young people and adults. On the question of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), which constitutes a central pillar for the knowledge society, a set of proposals and initiatives have been formulated that will help to improve the current situation of

ICT in the Arab countries and reinforce its importance in the health, economic, social, and fields of knowledge in general. The report also emphasises that a revitalisation of the Arabic language is required to make it capable of mastering Arabic epistemological and digital content. The writers of the Report focus on the fact that the tasks designed to provide the optimal investment of ICT in the building of the Arab knowledge society lie beyond the means of individual Arab states and make plain the necessity of mastering and deploying modern technology through cooperation both within Arab countries and with their regional and global partners.

The Report also touches on the subject of the innovation that, in reinforcing all that helps humankind transcend obstacles and constraints, enriches both the emotions and the mind. It is made clear that the concept of innovation sanctioned in the Report goes beyond the significations of the term “inventiveness,” which is linked fundamentally to the purely technical field and its tools, to embrace the Arab particularities of innovation in the arts, literature, and the human and social sciences. The Report presents a set of proposals on how to instigate innovation and tie it in to the various fields of production.

The select group of thinkers and scholars from all parts of the Arab region who have participated in the writing of this report justly acknowledge that their various proposals, which encapsulate a vision for the building of the knowledge society in the Arab homeland, favour the spirit and the options of human development. Special weight is given in the Report to defence of the principle of intercommunication both inside and outside the region, through partnership

and through productive and creative integration. This vision therefore suggests an achievable plan that includes markers along the route to an intercommunication that will lead to integration into spaces of knowledge that fly the flag of humanity and human intelligence, for the sake of partnership and creativity in the Arab societies.

The Arab Knowledge Report 2009–Towards Productive Intercommunication for Knowledge has laid the foundation for a practical treatment of this issue based on properly documented facts and a realistic view of the building of the knowledge society. We look forward to future reports that treat, through research and more profound study, the chief elements along the path to the building of the hoped-for knowledge society; from the firm grounding of enabling environments and the transfer and indigenisation of knowledge to its optimal deployment in the service of human development.

Space will allow me here to do no more than express my thanks and appreciation to all those who shared in the realisation of this report, including the writers, advisers, coordinators, and editing teams, as well as the work teams at both the United Nations Development Programme and the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation. It also gives me special pleasure to express my gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum for his help and support for this series of reports on knowledge in the Arab region, and to declare my hope that the collaboration between us in all matters that enrich and deepen the Arab knowledge and cultural base and strengthen the outlook for sustainable human development in the Arab homeland and the world as a whole will continue.

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