



A Region in Motion:

Reflections

from West Asia-North Africa

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يتحمل المؤلف كامل المسؤولية عن محتوى مصنفه ولا يعتبر هذا المصنف عن رأي دائرة المكتبة الوطنية أو أي جهة حكومية أخرى.

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Abbreviations

CBO	community-based organisations
CM	cubic metres
CRiSTAL	Community-based Risk Screening Tool–Adaptation and Livelihoods
DoS	Department of Statistics
EUR	euro
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GHG	greenhouse gas emissions
GWh	gigawatt hours
ICT	information and communications technology
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILS	Israeli new shekel
(I)NGO	(international) non-governmental organisation
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWRM	integrated water resource management
JOD	Jordanian dinar
JREEEF	Jordan Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Fund
MCM	million cubic metres
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEMR	Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources
MENA	Middle East and North Africa

MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOEnv	Ministry of Environment
MoPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MWI	Ministry of Water and Irrigation
NCARE	National Centre for Agricultural Research and Extension
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P/CVE	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RoO	Rules of Origin
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPNL	Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (“UN Refugee Agency”)
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
USD	US dollar
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WAJ	Water Authority of Jordan
WANA	West Asia-North Africa
WASH	water, sanitation, hygiene
ZRB	Zarqa river basin

Foreword

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal

Chairman and Founder of the WANA Institute

I am delighted to present the second WANA yearbook, highlighting the best of the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute's 2017 research and funded with the generosity of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

In 2008, when I first conceived of the idea for a regional initiative, I hoped to gather regional stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to work together—within and across disciplines—to address the social, environmental and economic issues facing the peoples of this region. I advocated for a definition of the West Asia-North Africa region less rooted in political geography and based more on an understanding of human geography, with shifting flows of people, resources and ideas. For this to happen, it became clear that we needed to build a regional knowledgebase.

This initial thought soon developed into an annual WANA Forum, in which authentic voices from the WANA region could promote innovative ideas and policies to jointly tackle our shared concerns. The strategy was two-fold: to facilitate the exchange of ideas, expertise and experiences between shared interest groups of public, private and civil society individuals and organisations, and to link existing regional and international initiatives and partnerships. This was an attempt to develop an economic and social conscience for good governance in the region.

The first annual WANA Forum took place over two days in April 2009 in Amman. It hosted over 70 high-profile representatives from the region and beyond, and offered a chance for state and civil society actors to come up with a fresh approach to the region. Over the course of this highly successful five-year initiative (2008–2013), it became apparent that there was an acute need for a more permanent regional resource which could delve deeper into the pressing issues affecting the region.

Some ten years later, the WANA Institute is fully established as one of the leading independent, non-profit policy think tanks in the region. Housed at the Royal Scientific Society, it promotes a transition towards evidence-based policy and programming to combat the development challenges of the region as well as provide a constructive forum for dialogue, analysis and idea sharing between academic, policy and development stakeholders.

True to the Forum's original objectives, the WANA Institute's motto is "knowledge from the region, for the region." With over 80 research projects to its name in the areas of human security, social justice and sustainable development, and a permanent staff of 22 seasoned academics, young researchers and development specialists, the WANA Institute has a growing reputation as the place to go to for independent evidence-based regional research and training, and as an arena for discussion and debate.

This second WANA yearbook brings together an edited volume of the Institute's finest research outputs from 2017. Carefully selected to display the wide range of WANA's work over the course of the year, the book includes chapters on the discourse around violent extremism, a study of Jordan's recent economic performance and reviews of Jordan's Syria refugee labour integration policy, higher education opportunities for Syrian refugees and civil society's balance of power with donors and government. There are also several chapters on the challenges the region faces with climate change adaptation, water needs and implementing the SDGs in the region. Included is a fascinating piece of research advocating for a Hima resurgence, a traditional rangeland management system dependent on sustainable land use patterns to combat scarce resources, particularly water.

There were, of course, many other highlights on the WANA Institute's 2017 calendar, not reflected in this edited volume. WANA produced no less than 21 research publications in 2017 alone and hosted 72 workshops, conferences, roundtable and focus group discussions with participants from throughout the region. Particular highlights were the Academia4Refugees roundtable held with UNHCR in April 2017 and the Youth Dialogues held with Wilton Park in October 2017. WANA Institute research findings have appeared 75 times in print and online media, TV and radio broadcasts—a reflection of the high regard many media outlets are now giving to WANA opinions. In addition, WANA researchers participated in conferences in France, Germany, Lebanon, Malta, the Netherlands, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, the UAE, the UK and the USA, sharing and disseminating the Institute's work and ethos of regional cooperation and dialogue.

I encourage you all to read, discuss and disseminate the research outcomes contained in this edited volume and to continue to give your full support to the WANA Institute in 2018 and beyond. It is an important regional instrument that provides evidence-based policy recommendations and vision in an increasingly troubled region.

Introduction

Dr Erica Harper

The West Asia-North Africa region has rarely been lacking in hardship. It sits at a complex crossroads where the impacts of chronic conflict, cultural fragmentation, and vested geopolitical interests collide in ways that threaten its stability and sustainability. Indeed, it is not difficult to view the region's future in pessimistic terms. Protracted human displacement, intractable conflict, violent extremism, and a youth bulge are all phenomena singularly associated with it. The year 2017 saw several of these trends evolve and manifest in disturbing ways. Other trends are emergent, and it remains to be seen whether they will edge the region towards indelible turmoil.

This research compilation builds on our previous edited volume *From Politics to Policy: Building Regional Resilience in West Asia and North Africa*, which unpacked the concept of fragility, specifically in the context of the emerging debate on resilience. Challenging the dominant narrative which centred around early warning and contingency planning, it told the story of how conflict, disaster, and adversity could be viewed equally as challenges and as opportunities.

The chapters put forward the idea that resilience was less about avoiding the unexpected than it was about the learning and strengthening that accompanies recovery. History provides myriad examples: an earthquake facilitates reconstruction using bespoke infrastructure, government collapse creates openings for the participation of civic-minded progressives, and an epidemic promotes research into preventative medicine.

Of course, prudent steps should always be taken to protect against known threats. To do otherwise would be negligent, and in some cases unlawful. Yet this should not imply that every negative outcome should be mitigated against. Such hyper-risk-aversion can result in a misallocation of resources and missed opportunities for experiential learning. In short, what makes us resilient is not shielding ourselves from all uncertainty—it is instead the experience of adversity and the growth that follows it.

Because governments, development agencies, and the donors that fund them are characteristically risk-averse, resources, thinking, and action around these trends have generally centred around the potential risks they pose, and how they can best be managed. This is understandable. The people of the region know better than any the consequences that follow from instability, war, and displacement. Likewise, the international community understands how these phenomena spill over, including in the forms of irregular migration and extremism. But as a consequence, rarely are new trends examined through a lens of opportunity—as pathways to strengthen geopolitical credibility or usher in a new era of growth and stability. The discussion below aims to stimulate a debate around this topic, and particularly on how stakeholders—civil society, policy-makers, donors, and development actors—can play a role in moving from being reactionary to seizing opportunities.

Technological Advancement

A first trend lies in the diverse ways in which technological advancement is changing the way we work, live, and relate to one another. The extent of this evolution is captured provocatively in Klaus Schwab's *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Schwab argues that humanity is sitting on a technological precipice, the implications of which cannot yet be envisaged. We have, of course, seen major tech-driven shifts before. In the 1930s, Keynes famously coined the term “technological unemployment”—warning that labour redundancy would outpace job creation, unleashing widespread and negative social outcomes.¹ Such fears did not materialise; indeed in each of the industrial revolutions, labour markets adapted and new economies evolved relatively smoothly and without significant social upheaval.² Today may be different, however, simply due to the speed at which innovation is transforming our lives: “contrary to previous industrial revolutions, this one is evolving at an exponential rate rather than linear pace.”³

For the people of the WANA region, perhaps the biggest win here rests with the consumer. Never before has a more diverse range of goods and services been available at lower cost. There is no better example than

¹ K. Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 35.

² *Ibid.*, 36.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

computer technology; 1GB of storage currently costs around USD0.03 per year, compared to USD10,000 dollars 20 years ago.⁴ A further opportunity is the reduced entry barriers to entering new, high-growth markets. Today's "disruptor" companies—Uber, Facebook, Airbnb—were born from coupling ideas and connectivity, not capital. This is a significant levelling of the playing field, which could open up boundless opportunity for the youth of the region, as long as certain enabling conditions are available.

The problem is that these prerequisites are not present. Unfettered connectivity is still problematic, particularly in the region's low- and middle-income states. But perhaps more troubling is the absence of a regulatory framework that fosters innovation and entrepreneurialism. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index illustrates this most succinctly, with access to credit, corruption, and government bureaucracy ranking among the highest constraints. Unable to exploit the opportunities on offer, the people of the WANA region have little armoury to offset the costs at which the innovation age will come. Chief among these will be unemployment. Research suggests that 45 per cent of existing jobs in the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia could be automated today.⁵ Workforces inclined towards agrarianism and services, such as those of Jordan and Lebanon, risk being severely impacted. Indeed, among the top ten roles most prone to automation are farm labour, hotel and restaurant services, and secretarial and administrative work.⁶

The natural consequence of sector-specific redundancy is labour market polarisation and deepening inequality. Already, half of the world's assets are controlled by the richest 1 per cent of the population,⁷ and the region leads on global statistics, where average income inequality is 38.2 per cent.⁸ The dangers stemming from inequality are well-evidenced. Unequal societies are more conflict-prone; their citizens are more likely to suffer

⁴ K. Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 11-12.

⁵ Sarah Townsend, "World Government Summit: Almost Half of Middle East Jobs Could Be Automated Says Survey," *The National*, 11 February 2018.

⁶ C. B. Frey and M. Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?" Working paper for Oxford Martin Programme on Technology and Employment, 17 September 2013.

⁷ Schwab, *Fourth Industrial Revolution*, 92.

⁸ M. Ncube, J. Anyanwu, and K. Hausken, *Inequality, Economic Growth, and Poverty in the Middle East and North Africa*, Working Paper 195 (Tunis Belvédère, Tunisia: African Development Bank Group, 2013), 8.

from a mental illness or be obese; and they perform worse in terms of social cohesion, with lower levels of trust and higher levels of violence.⁹ Given that the people of the region are already disillusioned by weak governance, chronic conflict, and economic stagnation, the combined impact of further thwarted opportunity, unemployment, and inequality is likely to be uncontainable.¹⁰

Climate Change

A second trend concerns the impacts that climate change will have on the food security and economies of WANA states. As Lara Nasser notes in her chapter “Climate Change Adaptation in Jordanian Communities,” the science tells us that in addition to increased temperature and more frequent drought, sudden and extreme weather events will be more common. This will affect food production and security, the availability of water for human consumption and industrial purposes, and the sustainability of ecosystems. Dr Michael Gilmont’s chapter on water decoupling explains how the solutions required do not necessarily depend on scientific advancement, however. His work with farmers in the Jordan Valley revealed that they know how to conserve water and cultivate more efficiently, but they lack the enabling policy environment to do it. Flood irrigation, for example, is routinely used over drip irrigation, simply because farmers do not enjoy reliability and continuity in water supply, or accurate and timely data on weather patterns. Likewise, while yields could be increased with specialist equipment, farmers lack access to affordable credit, insurance is unavailable, and the regulatory framework disincentivises the formation of cooperatives.

The question is thus whether policy-makers will set in place the required framework. But setting the “right” path is not always easy. To ensure governments take on the arduous task of price reform and enforced efficiency is perhaps too much to ask the population, especially against the other challenges they face. Donors and political allies might agree. Likewise, to invest in modern agricultural infrastructure, data collection, and research—against other imperatives and a climate of uncertainty—may not be deemed feasible.

⁹ R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, quoted in Schwab, *Fourth Industrial Revolution*, 93.

¹⁰ Schwab, *Fourth Industrial Revolution*, 12–13.

Migration

A third trend is migration. The past five years have seen one of the largest forced displacement crises unfold. Approximately 10.3 million Syrians have been displaced, with 2.9 million registered by UNHCR in Turkey, over 1 million in Lebanon, 660,000 in Jordan,¹¹ 241,000 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and 122,000 in Egypt.¹² While this was not the first such crisis to hit the region, the response tabled was almost entirely unique. The proposal sought to integrate refugees into local economies, thus providing the low-cost labour force needed to expand the industrial sector and lift host states out of economic stagnation. Donors and international organisations were quick to throw their support behind the initiative. From a humanitarian perspective, providing refugees with livelihoods was far preferable to the indignity and inefficiency of long-term humanitarian support. They also perhaps foresaw that funding would soon need to be scaled back, and that livelihoods might cushion this.

Yet the key stakeholders became frustrated when results did not accrue as quickly as anticipated. A cat-and-mouse game ensued, with donors withholding funds until progress (which arguably required funds) could be demonstrated. Indeed, the compact agreements were perhaps too optimistic and based on imperfect evidence. Our research, showcased in Shaddin Alhajahmad and Dorsey Lockhart's chapter reviewing Jordan's refugee labour integration policy, found that simply legalising and offsetting visa costs was insufficient to outweigh the monetary and non-monetary benefits of informal employment. Moreover, manufacturing firms did not want to employ workers that they saw as temporary: the in-house training required was simply too resource-heavy. Finally, the government probably set itself too high a target. Based on data collected by the WANA Institute in 2017, the combined male-female labour participation of Syrian refugees sits at around 163,000. This means that even if all males and females able and willing to participate in the labour market could find employment, Jordan would still only be able to reach around 80 per cent of its 200,000 work permit goal.

¹¹ UN, "Refugees," n. d., www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/refugees/index.html.

¹² UNHCR, *3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015–2019: In Response to the Syria Crisis. Regional Strategic Overview* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2017).

Admittedly, the compact agreements could have been better structured. But it is also the case that impatience, risk aversion, and an unwillingness to tweak the agreed-upon package prevented a more successful outcome. The situation has now come full circle. While employment has increased, most refugees live in poverty. Donors are now exhibiting “fatigue” and as cutbacks loom, host states may begin to flex their muscles by threatening to limit their hospitality. Jordan, in particular, fears being let down by the international community. After the country took in refugees and made the highly unpopular political decision to open its labour markets in a climate of slow growth and high unemployment, donors may be losing interest in supporting new markets with employment potential and growth opportunities. What will happen next is difficult to determine. It is likely, however, that states in the region, and further afield, will be far more cautious in extending livelihoods privileges to refugees in future protracted situations. This would be a missed opportunity for all stakeholders.

Unequal Power Relations

A fourth development is the impact the #MeToo social media campaign has had on gender relations worldwide, and the potential trickle-down effect this may have on the WANA region. Certainly, with the world’s highest gender gap (in 2017, the gap stood at 40 per cent),¹³ women’s empowerment is a sine qua non for economic growth, good governance and peacebuilding. Certain nexuses deserve specific attention. Despite strong gains in female education (the regional female-to-male primary enrolment ratio was 96 per cent in 2013, against 98.3 per cent worldwide), women’s participation in the public sphere and labour markets continues to lag. Women’s labour force participation in the region—at around 21 per cent in 2017—is among the lowest worldwide.¹⁴

Our research suggests that women’s exclusion from public, private sector, and civic life stems from an interwoven and reinforcing set of constraints. Chief among these is the absence of a legal framework that sufficiently

¹³ World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2017* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2017), 18.

¹⁴ ILO, “Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15+) (Modeled ILO Estimate),” ILOSTAT Database, World Bank, March 2017, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=ZQ>.

protects women from discrimination, harassment, and violence. For example, our primary data collection highlighted that many women avoid the workforce due to fear of sexual harassment, and others seek to delay marriage due to fear of violence.

In redressing this situation, it is important to understand the linkages between gender inequality in the region and the broader phenomenon of power consolidation and its unregulated use. Unequal power relations exist not only between men and women, but also between tribes, economic classes, people of different religions, and young people and adults. In many ways, abuse of power at these latter levels is even less regulated and thus harder to address. Esraa Alshyab, Mahmoud Nabulsi, and my chapter on civil society empowerment highlights that power imbalances significantly hamper the work of grassroots actors. Only with robust laws (that transcend partnership jurisdictions) and reporting channels can such imbalances be rectified and can civil society become a determinative player in development.

Violent Extremism

Trends cannot be discussed without mentioning the impact of violent extremism. While the story of 2017 was the military defeat of Daesh, it would be naive to think that this marks its end. As researcher Barik Mhadeen expressed in his November 2017 op-ed,¹⁵ as long as the Daesh ideology remains unaddressed, the world will continue to see sporadic attacks. This is concerning, given that the approach to date has been largely skewed towards risk containment and prevention, as opposed to fighting the ideology that is behind attacks. Indeed, global response patterns epitomise what Al Gore has termed “fear’s crowding out of reason and rationality.” In WANA states, governments have hijacked the Daesh threat to tighten their grip on power, impose further restrictions on civil society’s operating space, and curtail civic freedoms such as free media. Similarly, in the West, elaborated legislation has encroached upon due process rights, including to judicial review and protection against arbitrary arrest, as well as fundamental civic rights including to privacy and a nationality.

¹⁵ Barik Mhadeen, “In the Wake of Its Military Defeat, Prepare for Daesh 2.0,” The Daily Star (Lebanon), 7 November 2017.

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