From Inherit Challenges facing the Arab State to the Arab Uprising: The Governance Deficit vs. Development

Break-out Group II: Stakeholders Accountability in Public Governance for Development

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The very nature of most Arab states relegates them to a conflict or political turmoil pre-desposition, which is due to the following:

- **Economic and political power is concentrated in the hands of the very few**
  - Widening gap between rich and poor, middle class is turning extinct
- **Security states**, guarding the establishments and rooting out any form of potential opposition. The Security establishment has been marred by Human Rights abuses and corruption.
- **highly centralized states**, dominated by an inefficient and bloated public sector, weak Private sector, underdeveloped and in the hands of the ruling elite, its family or allies.
- **External revenues** (oil, aid or remittances) form the basis of national political economies. They are utilized as rents to maintain the rule and monopolies of ruling elite and allies.
The Arab State and Arab Uprisings: A challenge to the Political and Economic Status Quo

- **Command economy replaced with neoliberal economy**
  - Increased capital cronyism and inequality to the detriment of the “benefits-for-compliance ruling bargain”

- **Youth bulge in “waithood”**
  - Much delayed employment, marriage and social participation

- **Vulnerability to External (Foreign) Influence**
  - Israeli occupation of Arab land, including Palestine
  - Foreign military interventions, which at present has manifested national fragmentation along ethnic and sectarian lines with detrimental ramifications on the current Syrian conflict and beyond
  - International /Regional Power Politics

- **Vulnerability to Economic Shocks**
  - Massive inflation in the price of food increase worldwide caused Arab household incomes to decline substantively to the detriment of the middle class and poor, particularly in conflict affected countries
  - Oil dependency

- **Autocratic state system, including the lack of participatory, representative and accountable institutions** forces people or non-state actors to take matters into their own hands
The Nature of the post-colonial Arab State and the Root Causes of the Arab Revolt are inseparable from the root causes of conflict and political instability in all Arab states.

Elements or factors that make the Arab state or Uprising play themselves out in varying proportions and intensity (conflict affected transition - Syria, vibrant transition – Tunis and Egypt or conservative transition – Jordan).

These elements form a **Vicious Cycle of Conflict and Political Turmoil** are driven by a continuous deepening governance deficit.
The Governance Deficit: The Main Driver of the Vicious Cycle of Conflict and its Spillover Effects

- Lack of capacity to provide essential services
- Bloated, ineffective and corrupt, catering to ruling elites’ political and economic needs
- Lack of resources for training or modern administrative practices, which undermines a successful transition and render state institution ineffective to manage/resolve conflict thus causing autocratic or civil strife relapse

Weak State Institutions

- Conflict (Political turmoil in the form of the Arab Uprising i.e. Egypt and/or Civil Strife i.e. Syria)
- Weak Political Will

External Factors

- Forces of Globalization and Global Emerging Trends (i.e. Triple F Crisis)
  - Climate change (including scarcity of water) and the food crisis are easily root causes of political turmoil and wars
- International/Regional Power Politics
  - Proxy wars through a growth of non-state actors. Continued Israeli occupation of Palestine, unresolved Palestinian refugee problems in host countries

Negative Socio-Economic Trends

- Horizontal Inequality
- Social polarization & Lack of social cohesion
- Primary commodity dependence
- Youth frustration arising from lack of participation, unemployment and under education, hence more susceptible to extremism or migration

Ruling elite commitment to end conflict?
- Utilization of narrow and exclusively inward looking ethnic, sectarian or tribal discourse to create communities of mutual fears and suspicion
- Uncommitted ruling elite to build state and public institutions through the application of sound governance practices
- Ruling elite dependence on and seeking and expanding sources of rents (sources: international assistance, oil or remittances)
Breaking the Vicious Cycle of conflict/political tensions and ensuring a successful democratic transition requires the same ingredients:

• A commitment to build state institutions where good governance (accountability, transparency and meritocracy ....) is the norm

• A commitment to transitional justice, reconciliation and national dialogue of which outcome is a commitment to a pluralistic, participatory and accountable governance system

• Developing a governance system where the separation between the three branches of government (judiciary, executive and legislature) are independent of each other, in particular from the military and/or politico-economic elites.
Support good governance & building of state institutions to ferment national identity, strengthen and sustain economic recovery as well as ensure social equity/justice.

A serious shift towards participatory, accountable and pluralistic governance or democratization will entail redirecting scarce resources in public budgets away from security and policing, which traditionally accounted for sizable portions of GDP, towards implementing effective and innovative social programs geared towards poverty alleviation, education, maternal/child health ….

Elected officials will derive their future mandates to govern on the basis of their ability to deliver concrete improvements in standards of living for the public.
Post Conflict and Transition Towards Democratic Governance: Ingredients for Success are Same! (Continued II)

• Decentralize and empower local councils or municipalities through legislative-political, fiscal and technical capacities and programmes that are anchored in national development priorities/objectives thereby creating resilience to the ramifications of conflict and facilitating citizen engagement at the local level.

• An open and unfettered civil society law that fosters the growth of a civic sector capable of leading citizen fora, consultations, advocacy ....

• Arab States’ introduction of information technologies and e-governance have the potential to improve the impact of development initiatives, if accompanied by political will, these technologies may improve both government responsiveness and civil society’s monitoring role.
• Private sector development through the support of SMEs - particularly in pre and post conflict and/or political transition phases
  – Private sector is critical for developing and sustaining the middle class which in turn is vital for expanding a population that is independent of subjugation by rentier system for the mere fact of having a separate income other than the sources of rents. It is such a population that can challenge the ruling elite or war lords, and induce political change. It is such a population that has the most of interest in a national identity and functioning state institutions as well as a nation that is not fragmented

• A characteristic of weak and failing states in the Arab world is weakness in collecting data which would make any policy formulation exercise – a speculative exercise. Required is an open access to information/data which in turn would strengthen democratic governance

An Arab Governance Report?
• Data-collection activities are monopolized by the state
• Lack of transparency in governance as data protects politicians and civil servants from being accountable

AGR = National Partners (CSOs & Public Sector) that have the Capacity (collect and analyze data) + Sustainability (biannual) + Regional Impartial/Objective Issuance entity

Requires:
• Data collection on frequent basis and defused periodically to public
• Adequate legislation and policies = Democratic system of governance
• Cultural shift from that of secrecy to transparency
• Can available tools on measuring governance be improved?
• What specific aspects of governance (a highly multidimensional concept) are incorporated in the measurement?
• How are indicators constructed? How statistically defendable are they?
• Are they constructed in a way to allow country or multi-period comparability?
• Do they rely on surveys, expert assessments or hard data?
• What can be done with countries that have no information?
• Is it possible to combine certain indicators into a unified measure of governance?