

Arab economic integration
In light of the current economic transformations,
Prof. Dr Moustafa El-Abdallah Al-Kafri

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The end of the twentieth century was marked in our planet by a prominent tendency towards the globalization of the economy and its comprehensiveness, and the globalization of the economy aims to unify the parts of the world economy and abolish the barriers that prevent the complete freedom of the flow of its elements and exchanges and the movement of its factors, whether they are commodities, capital, labor or technology. This means that all countries of the world are connected to a global financial and trade network, so that life has become impossible in isolation from this phenomenon that is changing the economic environment and directing it towards liberalizing trade and capital markets and increasing the production of international companies. ¹

Economic integration is a process of mutual dependence between the economies of a group of countries, including a common geographical, political or social factor, to different degrees and on certain bases, through which these countries aim to increase and support their economic and social capabilities, facilitate the development process and take advantage of the comparative advantage that other countries enjoy. There are many forms of this integration between a preferential regime or joint projects, a free trade area, a customs union, a common market and an economic union. ²

- Do Arab countries need economic integration?
- Can there be economic integration among the Arab countries?

Especially since many Arab countries are similar in their production, whether in the field of agriculture or industries, or in the production of raw materials, especially petroleum, mineral wealth

¹ – Dr. shreed Abed, Current Economic Transformations and the Future of Arab Economic Integration, Lecturer – Ibn Khaldoun University – Tiaret – Republic of Algeria.

² – Mazhar Al-Samman, Arab Economic Integration Why and How?

and petrochemicals. One of the most important goals of Arab economic integration:

- 1– Get the advantages of large–scale production.
- 2– Benefiting from the skills of technicians and skilled labor and training the unskilled in a better way on a large scale (nationally).
- 3– Facilitate the process of economic development.
- 4– Diversify production in an economic way, which may protect the economies of member states from some setbacks, fluctuations and foreign policies.
- 5– Raising the standard of living of citizens.
- 6– Reducing dependence on the outside, which leads, as mentioned earlier, to limited vulnerability to external economic and political fluctuations, especially if integration has reached an advanced stage.

(Several socio–economic problems, which formed and developed over the past 20th century, have passed on to the first decades of the 21st century. On top of these problems come unequal distribution of income, poverty, fluctuating oil prices, and the rise of rentier Arab countries, as well as the interdependence between the neo–liberal and developing Arab economies, which affects macro prices, impacting— in turn— micro prices).³

Arab Cooperation Project (Arab Vision):

Although the Arab cooperation project (the Arab vision) is one of the oldest projects historically, it has clashed with obstacles and setbacks that have prevented the achievement of Arab economic integration, weak commercial and industrial ties between Arab countries, lack of confidence in the business sectors, and complete absence of coordination of policies to support trade. and development, and not realizing the seriousness of the common challenges faced by Arab countries in the era of globalization or (Americanization), the existence of local economic systems and

³ – Macro prices refer to exchange, interest and wholesale rates as well as wages ratio and micro prices reflect services and commodity prices in local markets.

laws that impede the movement of Arab capital within the Arab region, the varying levels of customs protection, the underdevelopment of the structural construction of the production process, the spread of financial and administrative corruption, and the weakness of Infrastructure, frequent armed conflicts and regional wars (the Iraq war).⁴

The Arab countries possess the elements of joint economic action:

If one of the most prominent features of economic globalization is the commercial liberalization of goods and services on the one hand, and the liberalization of the flow of capital in the form of direct and indirect investments on the other hand, it seems clear that the Arab countries are unable to confront savage monopolistic forces imposed by the challenges of globalization due to the semi-productive backwardness that characterizes their economies and my capitalist. Therefore, it has become the duty of our Arab governments to search for methods of collective action in the form of Arab regional blocs, as well as to search for methods of participation with the regional neighbors in the south, north and east, so that they can integrate into the global economy at the lowest costs and ensure protection for themselves from the barbarism of globalization.

The Arab countries possess the elements of joint economic action:

The most important feature of the Arab world economically is its possession of the largest global reserves of global oil and gas, and it is abounding with many other resources. in another territory. The contemplative view of the economic and social indicators in the Arab countries gives a clear impression of the failure of the management and administration of the affairs of the Arab countries,

⁴ – Dr. shreed Abed, Current Economic Transformations and the Future of Arab Economic Integration, Lecturer – Ibn Khaldoun University – Tiaret – Republic of Algeria.

and the failure to exploit their available capabilities at the level of their natural, agricultural, commercial and investment wealth.

Despite the fact that the Arab countries possess the ingredients for joint action, and despite the existence of economic charters and agreements that provide for it, facilitate the movement of trade exchanges, and neutralize economic work and keep it away from the fluctuations of politics, they have not been able to reach the acceptable level in their path towards integration. And it failed even to bring about commercial cooperation as a main entry point and a first step towards achieving this integration. Neither the free zones have succeeded, nor the transit trade agreements embodied, nor the agreements for the development of trade exchange achieved. Since the founding of the Arab League in 1945, several practical initiatives have been taken to liberalize inter-Arab trade, whether at the bilateral or collective level. The first of these was in 1953, the first agreement to facilitate trade exchange and regulate transit trade. Then came the decision of the Arab Common Market in 1964 to be followed by signing an agreement to facilitate and develop exchange Trade between the Arab countries in 1981, which translated the foundations of the strategy of joint Arab economic action approved by the Amman Summit in 1980. These attempts were not successful for decades, and they collided with obstacles that prevented the achievement of a comprehensive Arab economic bloc capable of achieving joint Arab economic integration, the most important of which was The lack of political will to overcome all the economic problems that hinder the establishment of the Arab Common Market, in addition to the differences and the political atmosphere existing between the Arab countries, in addition to the adherence of most of them to preserving customs revenues in covering their financial needs, which constitute the most important sources of financial income for them, and thus not activating Working mechanisms within free zones or customs unions.

The success of the Arab world in dealing with the changes imposed by the global economic environment depends on its ability to bring the Arab regional economic project into existence to build

an Arab economic system that bears the responsibilities of looking after Arab interests, and paying the potential risks that arise from international agreements, the World Trade Organization and partnership agreements.

Obstacles to achieving Arab economic integration:

Although the Arab economic integration project collided with obstacles and setbacks that prevented its realization, they were linked to many factors, as mentioned above. However, the Arab countries cannot remain isolated from the developments imposed by the global economic system, as they are forced to enter and coexist with these spaces imposed by globalization. Its unilateral and impulsive entry into American and European partnerships is only evidence of this, and a dedication to its endeavor for real integration into the global economy. The American call for the Middle East and the European call for Euro–Mediterranean participation stem from the sharp competition between them over the Arab region. No matter how much talk is, and the opinions of opponents and supporters of the partnership project conflict, the future of Arab trade will be better than it was during the past decades, given the role of this partnership, whether with America or with the European Union, in theoretically liberalizing it. Will this liberalization be a motive and behavior that pushes inter–Arab trade towards actual progress in the future if the Arabs behave well, or will it contribute to the dispersal of the Arab house and weaken the level of inter–Arab trade, and thus an obstacle to Arab economic unity?

Increasing Arab economic cooperation and working on providing basic needs to Arab citizens will reposition the Arab economy in global markets and economic blocs, like the European Common Market and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as well as enabling the regional Arab economy to compete globally. Even though the Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU) headed by its Secretary General, Dr. Ahmed Ahmed Jowaili, this council is ineffective like other Arab organizations because of contradictions in Arab economic systems. Some of

these contradictions started since post- World War II, whereas others are due to the interests of several Arab and non-Arab strata that started to connect state-managed institutional entities with economic organizations. Mixing state-managed institutions with economic organizations partly restricts integration and cooperation between economic policies, since institutional entities amend regulations in order to please economic organizations.⁵

Many difficulties face the achievement of Arab economic integration. These problems and obstacles, whether related to the Arab countries, individually or collectively, can be summarized as follows:⁶

1. The lack of political will in most Arab countries to establish an Arab economic cooperative grouping, and the absence of a clear philosophy for this cooperation and integration.
2. Weak mechanisms for implementing decisions, and the absence of an enforceable character, with the texts of the agreements lacking accuracy in defining the goal, the means, and even the wording, which often include loopholes that make it easier for member states to evade their obligations towards the agreements.
3. The weakness of the bodies that supervise the joint Arab action and the overlapping of their powers.
4. The existence of local economic laws and regulations that impede the movement of Arab capital within the Arab region, varying levels of customs protection, and the absence of an effective media apparatus to attract foreign investments.
5. The spread of financial and administrative corruption in state institutions, and its serious repercussions, especially in the field of attracting investments.
6. Weak infrastructure, with weak production bases, and industries based on different cultures, with low productivity,

⁵ – see Dr. Salam Tawfik El-Nagafy, *Could Arab Economies Achieve Unity? Hopes and Realities*, Translated by Mahitab Al-Assar.

⁶ – Previous source.

with the economic instability of most Arab countries characterized by inflation, the state budget deficit, the trade balance deficit and the balance of payments.

7. The similarity of the economic and social structures of the Arab countries, the lack of economic and commercial information related to commercial laws and legislation, and the lack of official information related to commercial facilities.
8. The difference in political systems, the dangers of situations of political instability, as well as the tendency to give priority to the national interest over the national interest, and the weakness and low levels of inter-Arab relations.
9. The existence of other alternative projects for Arab cooperation, such as the Middle East and the Euro-Mediterranean, under which most of the Arab countries are involved.
10. The dependence of Arab countries on energy as a major source of wealth represents one of the serious challenges facing the Arab economy, and therefore it is necessary to rationalize its exploitation and raise the efficiency of its use, and to search for alternative sources such as solar energy, vital energy, and the development of nuclear energy technology.

11. Economic Gaps

(The Joint Arab Economic Report of 2006 indicated that the aggregate GDP of all Arab countries was to the tune of \$ 1066.481 trillion, with variations in income distribution within Arab countries remarkably exist. In 2005, for example, stark disparity in income per capita occurred between low-income Arab countries and their oil-exporting counterparts when GDP in the latter exceeded half of the previously mentioned value (57.3 percent). One of the reasons behind such disparity is that most Arab governments have

neglected to build "welfare state" so average per capita income in the 1990s declined— compared to that in the 1970s).⁷

The agricultural challenge constitutes the most important challenge facing the Arab economy to ensure food security for the peoples of the Arab region, especially since the Arab food gap has exceeded the limits of \$15 billion annually. Therefore, it requires attention to agriculture and the development of agricultural production.

The existence of a deep scientific and technological divide between the Arab countries and the countries of the developed world, which makes them face a difficult challenge, which requires the development of scientific research, technological modernization, the establishment of a network of distinguished scientific centers, and keeping pace with the scientific and technological revolution as the key to progress and prosperity, especially since the needs of the Arab world in the information technology sector are estimated even in 2008, more than 13 billion dollars.

Rich Arab countries do not want to invest in poor Arab countries. While Arab investments abroad are worth more than \$1 trillion, poor Arab countries seek to increase foreign direct investments in order to guarantee growth. The final obstacle to Arab economic unity is the unjustified fallacy that some states argue that there is no relation between politics and economics.⁸

Joint Arab Economic Action Strategy:

Joint Arab economic action faces many difficulties and obstacles, but in spite of that, the Arabs have been able to accomplish a number of important steps on the road to Arab economic integration, after the Arab summit hosted by Jordan in 1980 was devoted to economic aspects, as it was known as (the Economic Summit). The Arab League), which approved a number

⁷ – Welfare state, that the state has responsibilities in providing the population with basic goods and services, like education and health care. Dr. Salam Tawfik El-Nagafy, *Could Arab Economies Achieve Unity? Hopes and Realities*, Translated by Mahitab Al-Assar.

⁸ - previous source.

of important documents, foremost among which is the strategy of joint Arab action for the period from 1980 to 2000. With the end of this strategy, it became necessary to consider the development of a new strategy that defines the parameters of the movement during the next two decades in the field of Arab economic integration and its repercussions on the overall Arab economic work the subscriber, and the duties of his institutions.

The new Arab economic integration strategy:

The new Arab economic integration strategy for the next twenty years 2000–2020 is based on a number of main axes, the most important of which are:

- Completion of the Arab Free Trade Area.
- Establishing an Arab customs union.
- Establishing an Arab investment zone that includes coordination, identification and investment promotion programs.
- Editing and guaranteeing investment and settling its disputes.
- Developing the Arab financial markets and linking them and achieving interconnection with the stages of monetary integration.
- Establishing an Arab technological zone that includes the programs of the Arab Scientific Research and Technology Network, transforming the Arab world into an electronic zone, and spreading electronic commerce.
- Developing the Arab infrastructure.
- Establishment of a single market for information and communication products and services
- Promote research and applications of bioengineering and the development of alternative and renewable energy sources.
- Establishing an Arab citizenship area that includes programs to bring together living standards in different locations, achieve social cohesion,

- Connecting Arab universities and higher institutes, and exchanging visits of youth and students.
- Addressing women's issues and empowering them.
- Adopting joint training programs.
- Adopting a joint program for a unified Arab population policy.
- Develop programs for joint manufacturing.
- Establishing an Arab electronic industry.
- Encouraging small and medium industries.

(This strategy stems from striving towards achieving a set of goals set by the Agreement on Economic Unity among the Arab Countries, which was approved in 1957 and entered into force in 1964, in order to achieve the future Arab economic unity by supporting the efforts of the Arab countries aimed at eliminating the existing differences between them and enhancing their capabilities towards achieving Arab development worthy of consideration).⁹

In fact, the motives and reasons for developing this strategy and working to implement it (are due not only to the necessity of speaking the language spoken by the world today and the central importance of the economic aspect in contemporary international relations and the spread and deepening of economic blocs, but also to the mutual interests and common benefits between the Arab countries for many reasons in the Its introduction, from the strategic perspective, is a group of interconnected factors that are summed up in the fact that developing and pushing Arab–Arab economic relations towards integration and cooperation makes them a tool for development, progress, self–power and national security, an impenetrable dam in the face of international and regional risks facing the Arab world, and a basis for dialogue with the growing economic blocs and the new global trading system.¹⁰

⁹ – Joint Arab Economic Action Strategy, Economic Documents No. 1, League of Arab States, Tunis 1982, p. 5.

¹⁰ – Joint Arab Economic Action Strategy, Economic Documents No. 1, League of Arab States, Tunis 1982, p. 5 – 6.

It is necessary to transcend the borders of small national entities and limited local markets to a larger Arab regional economic entity and broader markets to allow expansion and economic growth and the creation of new job opportunities to face and benefit from the real benefits of economies of scale and the flow of investments.

Activating joint Arab economic action requires:

first of all, defining a unified Arab economic strategy. What distinguishes the strategy is the long-term goals it sets for a particular society, and what it includes to determine the path of the movement of this society in order to reach and achieve these goals.

Where the starting points, goals, priorities, programs and mechanisms of joint economic action between Arab countries were defined, and stipulated that the effectiveness of joint Arab economic action depends on ridding Arab material resources of all foreign control, liberating the Arab economy from dependence, and raising its ability to interact as an equal partner with the centers of power in the global economy.

The goals were determined by striving to achieve national security, including intellectual, military, food and technological security, while strengthening the Arab military's own capacity to confront the Zionist challenge facing our Arab nation. The strategy also emphasized the need to develop and develop the human and labor force in the Arab world and to ensure their freedom of movement in accordance with the requirements of economic and social development in the Arab countries, to maintain these forces within the territories of the Arab world, and to expand reliance on Arab labor in order to reduce dependence on foreign labor.

Based on the goal of achieving socio-economic development in various parts of the Arab world and striving to reach the best forms of Arab economic cooperation, it is necessary to develop a strategy for joint Arab economic action that is based on achieving the greatest possible degree of self-reliance and getting rid of economic dependence on the major industrial countries.

The objectives of the joint Arab economic action strategy can be defined by the following points:

- Ridding the material and natural resources in the Arab world from any foreign control and employing them in the development process.
- Liberating the Arab economy from the economic dependence of the major industrial countries, and building advanced industries.
- Increasing the role and effectiveness of the Arab economy and achieving a reasonable position in the global economy.
- Liberating the Arab human being and unleashing his creative abilities to participate in the development process.
- Achieving national security, which includes (intellectual security, military security, food security, technological security and water security).
- Accelerating the pace of economic growth, by achieving the greatest degree of national self-reliance.
- Achieving the greatest possible proportionality between sectors and regions to meet the growing basic needs.

The realization or implementation of the strategy requires conditions and means of action that lead to it, and the strategy is usually characterized by comprehensiveness and the necessity of coordination and integration between its various aspects (goals, paths, movement, requirements, and conditions) and this applies to the strategy of joint Arab economic action.

This requires (the establishment of a new Arab economic system characterized by the integration that achieves comprehensive development and represents a pattern of division of labor within the Arab world, achieving development and liberation for the countries of the Arab world, and aims to remove dependence and stop the depletion of the resources of the Arab world and establish equal and fair economic relations between its countries).¹¹

Arranging for the foregoing, we can present a scientific conception of an effective strategy for joint Arab economic action

¹¹ – Previous source.

based on basic principles and main axes to be applied as a complete package according to the following:

So that the basic principles include: neutralizing joint Arab economic action from political action and urgent disagreements between Arab countries. And fair distribution of benefits and burdens on all parties. And linking the stages of integration to the stages of comprehensive development. A unifying attitude towards the outside world. The main axes are four:

- Arab manpower development,
- strengthening the infrastructure,
- agricultural development and food security,
- Manufacturing.

Requirements to activate joint Arab economic action:

Today, more than ever, Arab economists are required to think of a practical scenario for joint Arab economic action that leads to its activation. This scenario may include the following processes:

- Rationalizing the Qatari planning process, including expanding its national horizon and extending its sight to the longer term, meaning that in all this Arab reality, which witnesses the primacy of narrow Qatari interests over national interests, it is nothing less than working to urge each country that while thinking about its Qatari interests, not to add an obstacle or a new difficulty that hinders joint Arab economic action. Indeed, if he looked at his country's long-term interests, which is the best, he would have removed an obstacle or difficulty from the existing obstacles or difficulties in order to expedite the process of Arab economic integration. Naturally, this rationalization will only take place from Through increasing and intensifying communication and coordination between activities and planning agencies in the Arab countries.
- Choosing and selecting a group of investment activities whose advantages and returns may exceed the limits of national development to extend to support and advance national development (other countries), such as: water

resources, natural energy sources, infrastructure ... etc., as it may be better in such cases Investments should be made with a national effort rather than a national one, as they are characterized in many cases by the inability to be divided or by their being clearly subject to economies of scale.

- Collective attention to some development issues and problems that are directly or indirectly related to the country's development capabilities as well as the national development capacity, etc. Such issues and problems may be difficult for any country to face alone, whether due to the high financial expenditures or exceeding its human capabilities Available and possible, and if this or that is not, and we assume that each country spends on such issues, is it not possible to rationalize and avoid double spending?
- Why does the mind usually turn when talking about Arab integration to the role of governments and regimes, and not to the role of peoples and individuals? Achieving integration is not the responsibility of governments and regimes only, but that there is an important role that people in Arab countries, informal bodies, unions, unions and associations must play.

When the Arab Investors Conference was held in Alexandria on May 29, 1995, in which more than a thousand Arab investors participated, the attendees agreed on the necessity of facing challenges by reviving and activating Arab economic integration by economic blocs. Joint Arab economic action However, some Arab governments rush to an existing Middle Eastern market project.

The main points of this strategy should be:

- Using Arab funds to finance the socio-economic development process.
- Exploiting the natural resources available in the Arab world and employing them in the service of the economic development process in order to achieve the best return.

- Relying on qualified national technical cadres while making use of modern technology and contributing to its development and settlement.
- Reducing the development gap between the Arab countries.

The prospects for joint Arab economic action should not be limited to the mere construction and establishment of jointly financed projects or the occurrence of the transfer of labor and money. We can never doubt the feasibility and effectiveness of building such projects, or the occurrence of financial and human flows among Arab countries, but Arab economic action the joint also needs to bring about more organic interdependence in the production structures of the Arab world, and the optimal use of self, scientific and technological capabilities requires joint action between Arab countries.¹²

From the foregoing, it is clear that the practical vision that we see as appropriate for Arab integration must begin in part until we reach totalitarianism, because the comprehensive picture of integration at the beginning will certainly be above all the technical, administrative and organizational capacity of the Arab countries, in addition to being directly confronted with the challenges of the contemporary Arab reality. The partial picture, it can be in the amount and form that is commensurate with this reality and those capabilities, and therefore the gradual methodology is closer to application and success. For all activities and sectors in the Qatari economies for the entire Arab world, this is the ambition that neither reality nor capabilities is allowed to achieve. It is forbidden for the individual private project or the joint private project to play an important role in this regard if it has a long-term vision.

Reshaping the Arab region has become a necessary matter for which all visions call for, even if they differ in their orientations, whether it is related to the Arab vision, the Middle Eastern vision,

¹² – See, *The Arab Economy*, second issue, January 55, 1981, Beirut, p. 4–10.

the Mediterranean vision, or the new American vision for the broader Middle East.

The Arab countries have largely failed to establish integrated economic entities among themselves through integration and conglomeration and the formation of common markets and free zones. They cannot remain isolated from the developments imposed by the global economic environment. Rather, they found themselves forced to enter these new economic spaces imposed by the globalization of the economy. and its comprehensiveness, and it has begun to search unilaterally for protectionist arrangements for its economies by entering into major regional economic partnerships motivated by the forces of sharp competition between Europe and America.

A – It is clear to us from the above that Arab economic integration is the means and the way – perhaps the only one – at least from the point of view of those interested in issues of economic and social development – the most guarantee of achieving better living standards for the Arab citizen, and perhaps achieving the Arab dream, which seems impossible in the current circumstances and is a unity Arab world.

B – Despite the importance of economic obstacles to the success of any integration, the political will remains a decisive role in the success and continuation of any economic integration.

C – Benefiting from the methodology that was followed in some successful integrative experiences. Following the beginning with the easiest to reach the most difficult is perhaps the best approach for the Arab countries, as this method will enjoy the advantages of economic integration and become a necessary requirement, and not an issue imposed by some parties.

D – The natural resources that Arab countries enjoy, a vast market and a strategic location all represent an opportunity for the success of the required economic integration. ¹³

¹³ – Mazhar Al-Samman, Arab Economic Integration Why and How?

(There is a consensus that the future of countries in the coming decades depends primarily on their economic performance, and that the future conflict will be governed by the economy. Therefore, the majority of nations have realized the importance of joining under strong economic entities to face the challenges of globalization, and the integration of their economies into the global economic system, which is the endeavor that all aspire to achieve Arab countries through Arab economic integration, which still fluctuates between weakness and failure, or through the inevitability of partnership and affiliation with great powers such as the European Union and America through the Mediterranean and Middle East Partnership Projects, which will contribute to increasing the degree of fragmentation of the Arab world. ¹⁴

Since the current global economic conditions are characterized by the feature of economic blocs, which confirms that walking the path of the Arab economic bloc is the first and basic way to confront future economic challenges, especially external economic constraints (dependency), and at the same time it is the best solution to achieve comprehensive development in the Arab world and from this The premise is that the issue of economic action becomes the joint Arab economy and Arab economic integration at the top of the priorities for all Arab countries. Therefore, a return to the strategy of national economic action, and the development of a long-term Arab plan for comprehensive development that includes a clear vision of the areas of joint Arab action and the charter of economic action in both its national and joint types. Benefiting from the efforts made by scientific research institutions, and it is necessary to pay attention to the development, assimilation and adaptation of technology to get rid of dependence, strengthen the independence of the Arab nation and ensure its security. ¹⁵

¹⁴ – Dr. Bar Abed, Current Economic Transformations and the Future of Arab Economic Integration, Lecturer Professor, Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret, Algerian Republic.

¹⁵ – See, Arab Economic Integration, papers and discussions of the symposium organized by the Association of Arab Institutes and Centers for Economic and

In order to achieve the objective comprehensive vision, it is logical to imagine that the proposed general framework for joint Arab action with its specific objectives should be developed through a scientific, technical and political grouping in which the existing organizations for joint Arab action contribute to its organization and work.

Realism calls for Arab economic integration and integration to be a starting point for development. Realistic policies are the ones that secure this approach, which the European countries followed, starting with the economy, by bloc, integration, and unification, and then paved the complementary path required by economic necessities to reach political integration, social security and Arab national security. Many indicators indicate that joint Arab economic action still retains much of its vitality, flexibility and ability to achieve a lot for the Arab countries and the Arab citizen, whether that is through the existing Arab institutions or through bilateral and citizen cooperation between the various Arab countries, especially those neighboring each other.

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Social Development and the Economic and Social Research Council, Khartoum, February 13–15, 1989, Association of Arab Institutes and Centers for Economic and Social Development, Tunis.