General Report

International Scientific Forum on:

"The Future of the Middle East and the Gulf States — Vision 2030"

April 12th — 14th, 2025

Organized by:

Canadian Institute for Middle East and Gulf Studies (CIMEGS), Toronto — Canada

In partnership with the University of Derna — Libya

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Introduction

In light of the accelerating transformations unfolding across economic, technological, and environmental dimensions worldwide, the International Scientific Forum on "The Future of the Middle East and the Gulf States – Vision 2030" was held from April 12 to 14, 2025. This forum was jointly organized by the Canadian Institute for Middle East and Gulf Studies (Toronto, Canada) and the University of Derna (Libya).

The event served as a high-level platform for scientific dialogue and knowledge exchange, gathering 80 distinguished professors and researchers from universities and research institutions across various Arab and international countries — including Libya, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Palestine, Yemen, Canada, Belgium, the UAE, China, Greece, and others — to address the major challenges and opportunities facing the region in the context of achieving the goals of Vision 2030.

Research contributions were presented across seven (7) scientific sessions, which enriched discussions around the following key thematic axes:
1. Technology and the Digital Revolution as Catalysts for Economic Transformation ;
2. Sustainable Development and Economic Transformations ;
3. Regional Security, Stability, and Their Impact on Investment and Trade ;
4. Geopolitical and Economic Challenges to Sustainable Development ;
5. Environmental Challenges and Climate Change ;
6. Public Health and Social Justice ;
7. International Partnerships and Regional Integration.

The forum's scientific sessions addressed a range of critical issues, including digital transformation, the green economy, food security, health equity, and regional integration. The presented papers and the richness of the discussions reflected a diversity of knowledge and analytical precision, revealing an advanced awareness of the magnitude of the challenges and the complexity of the regional and international contexts surrounding them.

The presentations unanimously affirmed that technology is no longer a choice but a central necessity for achieving inclusive growth. Digital transformation emerged as a driving force for emerging economies and a foundation for modernizing vital sectors such as health, education, and public services. Conversely, the papers also highlighted the widening digital divide, the lack of unified legislation, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities. The forum further emphasized the importance of responsibly integrating artificial intelligence into economic planning and foresight, and leveraging it in managing future risks.

On the developmental front, sustainable development in its various dimensions constituted a key point of convergence. The need to transition toward a green economy that considers environmental concerns without sacrificing growth was strongly emphasized. The forum highlighted the necessity of diversifying the economic base, enhancing local production, and linking national plans with the principles of sustainability and environmental and social justice. It also identified the challenges hindering green transformation in many Arab countries, particularly the absence of incentivizing legislation and the weak financing of environmental innovation.

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On another front, the forum engaged in an in-depth discussion on the impact of geopolitical crises and regional conflicts on investment, trade, and the capacity of states to build resilient economies. It was noted that the lack of Arab coordination and the fragmentation of economic policies weaken opportunities for integration and increase the vulnerability of states to global crises. The discussions underscored the importance of adopting flexible regional strategies that include early warning systems, logistical integration, and support for local economies in the face of external shocks.

Environmental and health-related issues were also at the center of the debate, as participants highlighted the severity of desertification, pollution, and water scarcity, alongside the limited adoption of renewable energy sources.

The forum's recommendations concluded that the region's deep and complex challenges require the adoption of new and comprehensive development models. Addressing these challenges goes beyond managing accumulated crises—it calls for the advancement of strategic planning systems based on strategic foresight as a key tool for understanding future transformations and guiding public policy toward more realistic and effective options.

There is an urgent need for this type of planning, especially in countries that require a fundamental transformation in institutional building, modernization of legislative and digital infrastructure, and the formulation of policies and strategies aligned with their local and contextual realities. This necessitates the adoption of systems thinking to manage complexity, define national priorities, facilitate coordination among stakeholders, and streamline financing and implementation through effective partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as civil society.

Equally emphasized was the need to redirect policies toward smart agriculture, develop the circular economy, and stimulate emerging environmental projects. Strong attention was also given to issues of health justice, the challenges of digital health, and malnutrition in hospitals, with a call to build healthcare systems founded on innovation and institutional integration.

At the conclusion of the forum, it was affirmed that The Future of the Middle East and the Gulf States depends on their ability to establish sustainable strategic partnerships, activate regional integration, and adopt new and comprehensive development models based on technology, knowledge, and justice. The final recommendations stressed the importance of unifying Arab efforts in the fields of digitization, food security, energy, and entrepreneurial education, while highlighting the need to invest in human capital and to link scientific research with economic transformation. One of the forum's most significant conclusions was that development is no longer solely tied to projects, but to systems—and to the capacity to transform vision into a comprehensive reality that touches both people and the environment.

From this standpoint, this report presents an in-depth analytical overview of a set of strategic themes related to digital transformation, sustainable development, the environment, security, health, education, and regional integration. It is supported by practical findings and recommendations that contribute to building a more stable, just, and innovative future.

The rapporteurs' meeting concluded with a set of outcomes and recommendations for each thematic axis, detailed as follows:

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Axis 1: Technology and the Digital Revolution as Catalysts for Economic Transformation

Digital transformation and modern technologies represent a fundamental pillar in reshaping the global economic landscape. The Gulf and Middle Eastern countries have emerged as active players in this trajectory by launching ambitious national strategies centered on artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things.

Technology is no longer merely a supporting tool—it has become the driving force behind growth, innovation, and the enhancement of productivity and service efficiency. However, this transformation is accompanied by several challenges, most notably the widening digital divide, weak legislative frameworks, and the limited availability of specialized human capital.

This axis highlights the strategic role of the digital revolution in supporting Vision 2030 across Arab countries, while proposing practical solutions to ensure that technological opportunities are translated into sustainable, inclusive, and tangible development outcomes.

First: Key Findings

1. Digital transformation has become a key driver of economic development, contributing to improved productivity, easier market access, and greater resilience across economic sectors.
2. The digital economy is experiencing rapid growth in Gulf and Middle Eastern countries, particularly in areas such as e-commerce, digital services, and healthcare.
3. Experiences have shown that integrating artificial intelligence into economic processes increases operational efficiency, reduces costs, and enhances competitiveness.
4. The use of technology has expanded to include cybersecurity, education, medicine, agriculture, and public services, indicating a broad and multi-faceted digital transformation.
5. Some countries still face weaknesses in digital infrastructure and a lack of adequate regulatory frameworks to govern digital transformation.
6. The digital divide between developed and developing countries in the region remains a major challenge, posing a risk of uneven transformation and undermining inclusive development opportunities.
7. Cybersecurity is facing increasing challenges due to the rise in cyberattacks, the absence of unified legislation, and a severe shortage of specialized personnel.
8. Successful experiences in Saudi Arabia have demonstrated the significant positive impact of public-private partnerships in developing smart and effective digital solutions.

Second: Recommendations

1. Strengthen digital infrastructure through large-scale investments in communication networks, data centers, and cloud computing systems, with a focus on covering remote and rural areas.
2. Update and harmonize digital legislation to include personal data protection, e-commerce, digital transactions, and artificial intelligence, while taking cultural and social specificities into account.
3. Develop clear digital regulations to safeguard privacy and ensure information security in line with international standards.

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4. Integrate artificial intelligence into economic processes and allocate programs for developing AI-driven cybersecurity solutions.
5. Adopt data-driven economic foresight tools based on big data analytics and AI to monitor economic shifts in real time.
6. Launch national and regional digital platforms in health, education, and public administration to enable institutional integration and deliver remote services efficiently.
7. Adopt blockchain technology in key sectors such as health, energy, and transportation to secure data, ensure transparency, and reduce administrative costs.
8. Establish a unified Arab food security database using advanced digital technologies to connect information across countries and support collective decision-making.
9. Launch national initiatives to develop digital human capital by updating curricula, establishing technical schools, and supporting scientific research in technology.
10. Develop clear ethical standards for the use of artificial intelligence that respect privacy, fairness, and transparency, and engage civil society in their formulation.
11. Stimulate digital innovation by offering incentives to startups and innovators and establishing government-supported technology incubators.
12. Enhance regional and international cooperation in digital transformation through experience-sharing, support for open innovation, and the unification of digital infrastructure and standards.
13. Adopt performance indicators to measure digital transformation, including accessibility, quality, efficiency, and user satisfaction.

Axis 2: Sustainable Development and Economic Transformations

Sustainable development represents the comprehensive framework through which countries strive to balance the requirements of economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice for both present and future generations.

In the Arab context, challenges have increased due to reliance on a single economic sector, rising unemployment rates, and environmental degradation. These pressures have driven many countries to adopt green economy principles, diversify income sources, and strengthen public-private partnerships. Despite notable progress in some states, there remains an urgent need for structural reforms that ensure resource sustainability and reduce economic vulnerability to global crises.

This axis examines leading development experiences and practices in the region and proposes an integrated set of recommendations to support the transition toward a more sustainable and equitable economic model.

First: Key Findings
1. Experience confirms that economic sustainability forms the foundational basis for the transition to resilient smart cities, relying on the sustainability of financing, production, and resources.
2. The green economy has become one of the most prominent tools for balancing economic growth, environmental protection, and the promotion of social justice.
3. Some Arab economies still suffer from excessive dependence on a single sector, making them vulnerable to global crises.

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4. Multiple studies have shown that diversifying the economic base, stimulating local production, and reducing reliance on imports are critical factors in supporting economic stability.

5. Partnerships with the private sector and civil society serve as effective levers for promoting sustainable investments and achieving greater efficiency in the implementation of development projects.

6. There is noticeable disparity in the level of green economy policy adoption among Arab countries, despite the clear economic and environmental benefits.

7. Models of resilient smart cities have emphasized the importance of skilled human capital, the digital economy, and advanced technology as essential pillars for achieving true sustainable development.

8. Some countries, such as Algeria, have witnessed successful transitions by integrating renewable energy into their development strategies.

Second: Recommendations

1. Integrate green economy principles into national and regional development policies, with clear quantitative targets and performance indicators.

2. Diversify the economic base by supporting productive sectors and manufacturing industries, and reducing dependence on rent-based or raw-material exports.

3. Reform tax policies to incentivize sustainable enterprises and gradually impose environmental taxes on harmful activities.

4. Promote public-private partnerships for the implementation of sustainable development projects, particularly in the fields of renewable energy, education, and water.

5. Encourage investment in research and development in clean technologies and environmental innovation, and link universities to market needs.

6. Adopt environmental accounting systems to measure the ecological impact of institutions and projects and guide economic decision-making accordingly.

7. Mainstream international sustainability standards in economic institutions and make them part of market competitiveness.

8. Develop human capital by integrating concepts of sustainability and green economy into education and vocational training.

9. Ensure a just transition by providing support programs for workers in affected sectors and offering alternative green job opportunities.

10. Establish national and regional sustainable financing funds to support environmental and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) projects.

11. Develop measurement tools for progress toward sustainability that go beyond GDP, incorporating indicators of environmental justice, social equity, and economic efficiency.

12. Strengthen environmental transparency and accountability by publishing regular reports on progress toward sustainable development goals.

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Axis 3: Regional Security, Stability, and Their Impact on Investment and Trade

Regional stability is closely linked to the attractiveness of the investment climate and the vitality of commercial activity. Political and social security provide the foundation for market growth, business expansion, and the stability of supply chains. Conversely, geopolitical conflicts and security tensions lead to capital flight and reduced economic opportunities. Global crises—such as the Russia-Ukraine war—have demonstrated the extent of the interdependence between global and regional security, on one hand, and investment and trade, on the other. The experiences of some Gulf countries have highlighted the importance of legislative reforms, free zones, and economic integration in building resilience to shocks. This axis explores current security and economic challenges and presents practical recommendations for creating a stable environment capable of attracting quality investments and supporting long-term growth.

First: Key Findings
1. Security and stability are fundamental pillars for attracting investment and promoting economic growth, whereas regional conflicts and instability drive capital away.
2. A stable legislative environment in the Gulf states contributes to attracting strategic investments, unlike fragile environments characterized by policy volatility and weak transparency.
3. Some Arab countries still lack robust legal frameworks to protect investors, which limits their competitiveness in global markets.
4. Global geopolitical crises (such as the Russia-Ukraine war) have indirect effects on Middle Eastern markets, particularly through supply chains and energy and food prices.
5. Arab economic integration remains limited despite shared interests and similar challenges, hindering the formation of a unified market capable of withstanding global shifts.
6. Overreliance on imports—especially in food, medicine, and energy—represents a major vulnerability that increases exposure to international fluctuations.
7. Specialized regional partnerships, such as free zones and joint logistical corridors, have proven effective in mitigating the impact of regional instability.

Second: Recommendations
1. Strengthen legislative and institutional stability through comprehensive reforms that encourage investment and protect the rights of both local and foreign investors.
2. Adopt flexible economic policies capable of adapting to global geopolitical crises without compromising financial sustainability.
3. Develop legal and logistical infrastructure to attract quality investments in sectors such as technology, renewable energy, and knowledge-based industries.
4. Promote joint Arab investment in strategic sectors such as food, health, digital security, and clean industries.
5. Stimulate national investments in export-capable sectors and develop locally integrated value chains.
6. Enhance transparency and accountability in both public and private projects, and embed governance principles into all economic cooperation agreements.

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7. Empower entrepreneurship and investment in startups through incentive laws and smart financial support mechanisms.
8. Explicitly integrate economic security into national strategies, linking it to food, digital, and energy security.

Axis 4: Geopolitical and Economic Challenges to Sustainable Development

Sustainable development in the Middle East and North Africa is shaped by a complex array of geopolitical challenges, including armed conflicts, shifting international relations, and global economic crises. Repeated shocks—from the pandemic to regional wars—have revealed the fragility of economic structures, the deep dependency on single-income sources, and limited institutional resilience. Recent events have also highlighted weak Arab coordination in managing cross-border crises, and underscored the need for early warning systems, emergency financing, and flexible strategic planning.

First: Key Findings

1. Middle Eastern countries face chronic geopolitical challenges, including armed conflicts, border disputes, and political instability, all of which negatively affect prospects for sustainable development.
2. Fragile economies that rely on a single source of income, such as oil or remittances, are more vulnerable to global political and economic fluctuations.
3. There is a clear lack of coordination among Arab states in confronting geopolitical challenges across sectors such as food, energy, and digital security.
4. The global financial system does not equitably direct funding toward sustainable development projects, with financial flows often concentrated in markets or driven by geopolitical interests.
5. Weak integration of environmental and social dimensions into economic policies has reduced the capacity of states to address challenges related to climate change and social justice.

Second: Recommendations

1. Rebuild flexible economic strategies that account for potential conflict and volatility, with a focus on food and water security as strategic priorities.
2. Diversify national income sources by developing alternative sectors such as industry, tourism, the green economy, and the digital economy.
3. Establish joint Arab cooperation platforms to monitor geopolitical crises and their economic impacts, and to provide proactive policy recommendations.
4. Adopt national post-conflict recovery strategies that include reconstruction, reconciliation, and the advancement of human security.
5. Strengthen economic resilience by creating emergency funds, promoting collaborative financing, and moving toward self-sufficiency in critical sectors.
6. Link development policies to environmental and social governance to ensure resource sustainability and reinforce social cohesion.
7. Improve access to sustainable finance by mobilizing international support for environmental and social projects in conflict-affected countries.

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8. Launch joint regional programs in energy, water, and food to ensure continuity of supply and reduce geographic dependency.
9. Enhance the capacity of regional research and policy centers to analyze and lead intelligent responses to economic challenges.
10. Reinforce the commitment of developing countries in international conferences on climate and development to ensure their interests are reflected in global policy frameworks.
11. Establish national foresight units to anticipate crises and provide flexible development alternatives before breakdowns occur.
12. Link international funding to human development and social justice as a condition for the fair and effective allocation of aid and grants.

Axis 5: Environmental Challenges and Climate Change

Environmental challenges and climate change have become among the most pressing issues affecting the stability and development of nations, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions. From water scarcity and desertification to an increase in natural disasters and rising temperatures, the region faces severe environmental pressures.

Despite the vast potential in renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture, environmental policies in many Arab countries remain below the required standards in terms of planning, funding, and coordination. This axis examines the reality of climate change in the region and proposes proactive strategies to mitigate its impact through a shift toward a green economy, stronger environmental governance, and greater community engagement in environmental protection.

First: Key Findings
1. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa face accelerating environmental impacts, including desertification, water scarcity, rising temperatures, and more frequent climate-related disasters.
2. The Russia-Ukraine war highlighted the fragility of Arab food security, particularly given the region's heavy reliance on imports from specific countries.
3. Although some countries have expanded water treatment facilities, a large proportion of treated water is still not being effectively reused.
4. Emissions from transportation are among the main causes of pollution, especially in major cities that lack sustainable public transit systems.
5. Arab countries possess vast solar and wind energy resources, yet their utilization remains below potential.
6. Environmental policies suffer from weak coordination, the absence of effective legislation, and limited empowerment of civil society.
7. A significant portion of organic waste is lost without recycling or conversion into energy, contributing to pollution and the waste of valuable resources.
8. Traditional farming methods continue to be used in environmentally harmful ways, hindering the transition to climate-resilient and sustainable food production.

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Second: Recommendations

1. Transition to renewable energy as a strategic choice, supported by incentives for investment in solar power and biofuels.
2. Expand climate-smart agriculture by introducing modern techniques, drip irrigation, and drought-resistant seeds.
3. Reuse treated water in agriculture and industry, with legislation mandating the reduction of wastewater discharge into the sea.
4. Support small and medium-sized environmental projects through financial incentives and tax exemptions, while encouraging local innovation.
5. Improve sustainable public transport systems by shifting to electric buses and hybrid vehicles, and expanding urban transport networks.
6. Develop recycling policies that include waste sorting at the source and converting organic waste into energy or fertilizers.
7. Promote environmental education in school curricula and vocational training, linking environmental values with national identity.
8. Activate Arab regional cooperation on climate adaptation and the management of cross-border environmental crises such as desertification and water pollution.

Axis 6: Public Health and Social Justice

Public health and social justice are two fundamental pillars of any comprehensive and sustainable development model, reflecting a state's ability to provide a dignified and secure environment for its citizens.

In the face of accumulated challenges in the region—from disparities in access to healthcare and weak social protection systems to shortages of medical personnel in underserved areas—the gap between different social groups continues to widen, increasing societal vulnerability. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed shortcomings in the digital transformation of health systems and revealed a lack of integration between health and nutrition, particularly concerning malnutrition in hospitals.

This axis addresses the shortcomings in the health and social systems and presents practical mechanisms to promote health equity and social well-being through technology, partnerships, and equitable, sustainable planning.

First: Key Findings

1. Equitable access to quality healthcare remains a challenge in many Arab countries, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of health systems in several countries in the region and highlighted the urgent need for digital transformation in medical service delivery.
3. Digital health is emerging as a strategic tool to enhance healthcare efficiency, but its expansion is hindered by infrastructure gaps, public awareness, and regulatory frameworks.
4. Malnutrition remains prevalent in hospitals, especially among the elderly and cancer patients, due to the absence of professional nutritional programs integrated into clinical care.

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5. The digital divide affects equity in health service distribution, as certain groups face difficulty in accessing modern remote healthcare technologies.
6. True health equity depends on aligning health policies with social, economic, and cultural dimensions.
7. Health coverage programs and primary care services remain inadequate in many countries and reveal sharp disparities across regions and population groups.

Second: Recommendations
1. Expand universal health coverage to include all population groups, especially the marginalized, while ensuring quality and efficiency of care.
2. Launch unified national and regional digital health platforms to facilitate the integration of health institutions and secure medical data exchange.
3. Integrate artificial intelligence and precision medicine into diagnostic and treatment systems to enhance responses to chronic and complex conditions.
4. Improve digital infrastructure in hospitals and health centers, with a focus on bridging the digital divide between urban and rural areas.
5. Utilize blockchain technology in managing health data to reduce administrative errors and ensure privacy and transparency.
6. Develop clinical nutrition programs in hospitals through specialized teams of doctors, nutritionists, and pharmacists to ensure integrated dietary care.
7. Train doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers in modern medical nutrition concepts and their importance in improving treatment outcomes.
8. Link health equity to digital food security by investing in a unified Arab food security database to monitor malnutrition and guide healthcare resources to the most vulnerable.
9. Promote public-private partnerships in developing health infrastructure and expanding remote healthcare services.
10. Adopt clear performance indicators to measure healthcare quality, including access, responsiveness, effectiveness, and patient satisfaction.
11. Strengthen community health awareness through national and regional campaigns that integrate education, media, and civil society.
12. Incorporate health and social justice principles into health policies and align them with social security and protection strategies.

Axis 7: International Partnerships and Regional Integration

In light of accelerating global changes and increasingly interconnected crises, regional integration and international partnerships have become essential for enhancing countries' resilience and achieving sustainable development goals. Despite various challenges, Arab countries possess significant potential for cooperation in areas such as food security, education, energy, and digital health. However, the reality reveals a clear gap in coordination and a lack of joint institutional frameworks, leading to scattered resources. Tripartite partnerships between governments, the private sector, and academic institutions

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present a unique opportunity to accelerate development and generate innovative solutions to shared problems.

This axis highlights the importance of building an integrated Arab space that is actively engaged with the international community. It proposes practical recommendations to foster a culture of partnership, strengthen academic and technical cooperation, and align development policies at the regional level.

First: Key Findings

1. Regional partnerships among Arab countries remain below the required level, despite shared challenges that necessitate collective action in food security, energy, education, and digitalization.
2. Successful experiences in some Gulf countries (such as Qatar) have demonstrated the value of collaboration between the public and private sectors and academic institutions in accelerating development.
3. Development and digital policy coordination among Arab states remains weak, resulting in duplicated efforts and a lack of integrative impact.
4. Several existing international partnerships lack sustainability and governance due to the absence of formal institutional frameworks or overreliance on individual initiatives.
5. Cross-border educational and health programs have proven to be among the most effective tools for regional convergence and capacity integration.
6. Intra-Arab research collaboration remains modest compared to the region's scientific and human potential.
7. Infrastructure integration in sectors such as energy, transport, and digital health represents a strategic opportunity for joint growth.

Second: Recommendations

1. Establish permanent institutional mechanisms for regional integration, including platforms for joint strategic planning in health, food security, education, and energy sectors.
2. Launch unified Arab programs for digital education and technical training through partnerships among universities, governments, and research centers.
3. Promote tripartite partnerships (government–private sector–academia) to implement joint regional projects in key and emerging fields.
4. Create unified Arab databases in areas such as food security, health, climate change, and human resources.
5. Develop standardized Arab indicators to measure progress in digitalization, health, social justice, and education to support regional decision-making.
6. Expand research cooperation through joint funding for scientific projects aimed at solving regional challenges.
7. Launch cross-border education initiatives such as joint degrees, academic exchange programs, and regional postgraduate studies.

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8. Create transnational academic platforms that support integration in research, teaching, and vocational training.
9. Align entrepreneurship curricula with regional market needs through comprehensive review of university programs in coordination with the private sector.
10. Launch regional training programs for workers affected by the green transition to ensure a "just transition" and provide sustainable alternative employment.
11. Encourage technology transfer and localization through strategic partnerships with global powers, aligning them with local development needs.
12. Include regional integration as a national policy priority, with dedicated budgets within development plans.
13. Engage international and regional organizations such as ESCWA, the Islamic Development Bank, and Gulf investment funds to support Arab integration projects.

This report was issued in Toronto, Canada, on April 14, 2025.

It serves as an open scientific reference for researchers and a guiding framework for institutions concerned with development and transformation in the region.

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