

The Dilemma of Development in the Arabian Peninsula*

Osama Abdul Rahman

Reviewed by

Mohammed Fatty Mahmoud

Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, College of Administrative Sciences, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The present volume (a part from its last Chapter) is a translation of an Arabic version which was published in 1982. It is a study which attempts to investigate the dilemma of development in the oil-producing countries of the Arabian Peninsula (OPCAP). The book contains an introduction, Six chapters, conclusion and a very rich bibliography.

The author claims in the introduction that his book “attempts to explore the dimensions of development in the OPCAP and to identify the requirements and obstacles of development” [* ,p.3].

The reader of the book would immediately realize that it is broadly pessimistic about the prospects for development and sceptical about the achievements so far.

The author argues that “the OPCAP have been dazzled by the magic spell of oil and deluded into believing the development is at hand and they are going to live in eternal comfort. The region has been swept by a flood of phantasis as a result of the oil wealth, but it will wake up one day to realize that the oil has gone. Illusions and wishful thinking are, for the present and future of development, much more disastrous than any pessimism” [* ,p.4].

Although, one may not share the author’s pessimism, the fact remains that however long the oil might last, it is inescapably depletable. Also, to depend entirely on just one source makes the economic structure vulnerable to any influence from the variable and fluctuating world market.

*Abdul Rahman, Osama. *The Dilema of Development in the Arabian Peninsula*. London: Croom Helm, 1987.

The author offers a brilliant discussion on development administration in Chapter one. He considers as a more realistic definition of development administration “the administration capable of translating the aspirations of society into plans and programmes which are competently and efficiently implemented.” Such an administration possesses the will for development, it also possesses insight and shows determination and perseverance in the face of challenges; it interacts with society and has the skill to mobilise it; it develops material and human capital and utilises it to the maximum, thus creating a self-developing base in political, social, economic, educational and another dimensions in order to realise prosperity for present and future generations [* ,p.14].

Chapter two reviews the efforts of development and planning in the OPCAP. The author argues that “until recently there was no concept of development in the minds of decision-makers nor the majority of people in the OPCAP. Development meant copying the superficialities of culture from the advanced countries; spending was directed towards building and construction projects and importing up-to-date luxury products [* ,p.17].

The author admits that oil revenue made it possible to finance the development of infrastructure, to build institutions, to expand educational opportunities, to provide social service and health care and to introduce social and economic changes. He also recognizes that all OPCAP adopted economic policies based on two development priorities: (1) diversifying sources of income and (2) manpower development. But the author questions the effectiveness of economic planning in the region. He argues that “Development attempts have varied in size and content, but no definite plans have been adopted by most of the OPCAP. The attempts are mostly projects and programmes as a response to incidental needs or desires, but not on the basis of proper investigation” [* ,p.30]. Development in the OPCAP, according to the author, is more or less haphazard guess work which does not constitute development, for there is no competent planning even where plans have been adopted. All OPCAP (those with experience in development plans and those without) lack a clear economic and social vision convertible into definite ends. The basic problem in OPCAP, in the author’s point of view, is that they lack sound planning which requires the satisfaction of two important conditions: (1) the existence of a commitment to planning on the part of decision-makers, and (2) the availability of expertise capable of formulating realistic plans with due consideration to political, economic, social and administrative requirements and a defined direction towards the intended changes. In addition, planning demands an integrated pool of accurate information so as to avoid the guess work which flourishes in the absence of planning.

The author considers the issue of diversification of income sources of crucial importance. He argues that this diversification is possible if the OPCAP, committed to planning and the ability to formulate and implement plans, can give it the attention and effort required. He reviews the various propositions related to the accomplishment of the desired diversification and argues that the agriculture sector is more or

less non-existent and is losing grounds as a means of resolving the problem of diversification of income sources. He is also sceptical about industrialisation. Several of the huge industrial projects in the OPCAP, he argues, “are dependent almost entirely on foreign manpower - such a degree of dependence destroys the principal objectives behind the establishment of these industries, and it makes the economy as a whole lose the opportunity of interrelated growth capable of effecting further growth and reinforcement of economic structure” [*,p.41].

The author agrees that the OPCAP should develop oil related industries, but warned that they should not confine themselves to them, or build all their future expectations on them, otherwise they will have put all the eggs in one basket.

Perhaps, his major contribution in Chapter two lies in his statement that “co-operation and co-ordination among the OPCAP are essential. The individual national context represented by these divisions should be replaced by a unified comprehensive one” [*,p.49]. The urgent need for integration or unity of the OPCAP stems from the need to benefit from their depletable resources in a way that leads to the maximum possible economic, social and political returns and builds a continually productive base capable of creating prosperity for future generations; that is the chief objective of development and the responsibility of development administration.

Chapter three reviews the development of bureaucracy in OPCAP. The author argues that bureaucracy, although simple until recently, is being steadily inflated due to an unclear vision of future objectives and the abundance of financial resources. It is suffering from structural and behavioural defects of both external and internal origin [*,p.59].

The author argues that the real situation in the OPCAP manifests a wide gap between the civil service, education and training and the labour market [*, p.73]. He admits that Saudi Arabia has made attempts at administration reform but argues that “it still suffers from many administrative difficulties such as extreme centralisation, overlap of responsibilities, obsolete procedures, rising costs in the public service sector and low standard of technology utilization [*, p.80].

One can not help agree with the author that administrative reform is essentially of a social and political nature; it has political and social dimensions. As the author states “Administrative reform is an integral part of development, which is itself multidimensional. It represents the administrative side of development as is therefore, multidimensional in nature (politically, socially, culturally and administratively). As development is dependent on political support, education and social reform and human resource development, so is administrative reform [*, p.99].

Chapter four tries to build an appropriate model for development administration. The author argues that public enterprises in the OPCAP suffer from a low standard of performance. He attributes this to “ineffective control, defective administra-

tive and organizational structure and the shortage of administrative leadership capable of running large projects as well as the negative influence of the economic and social environment [* , p.112]. However, the author argues that public enterprise emerge as the better alternative which can invest the oil revenues in productive projects benefiting the economy. But the success of these enterprises demands the fulfillment of essential requirements:

1. objectives should be clearly defined
2. administrative leadership should be properly selected
3. independence of enterprises should be secured
4. recruitment should seek those best qualified
5. effective control should be carried out
6. performance should be evaluated

Chapter five discuss manpower development in OPCAP. The author argues that “the OPCAP existing educational and training programmes are still traditional and haphazard, have inadequate content, suffer from the scarcity of teaching and training talents and from inadequate planning and defective administration in general” [* , p.125].

Although one may not agree entirely with this point of view, it would be difficult to deny the fact that there is a general shortage of local manpower and university graduates do not fill the actual need, as on one side there is a very small number of graduates in highly specialised technical professional fields, and in the other side a surplus of specialised graduates. Such an imbalance is obvious in Saudi Arabia where the graduates from Arabic and Islamic “Sharia law” specialisations comprised nearly half the number of the graduates of all Saudi Universities. The same is more or less true in other OPCAP: 70 percent of the candidates graduated from most of the colleges are in the humanities and social sciences” [* , p.133]. The author is perfectly right to point out that educational policies should be properly guided and related to development requirements.

The author makes a significant contribution towards the solution of the problems of higher education in OPCAP. He argues that there should be a clearly-defined framework for the University’s expected objectives and the university’s administrative leadership should be properly selected according to objective criteria rather than subjective political or social influences. Also, academic freedom and an appropriate climate for research and innovation should be established. Moreover, the philosophy and the content of education should be adopted to societal problems and aspirations.

The author argues that OPCAP have not made any serious efforts concerning vocational training [* , p.150]. He offers some very useful suggestions: Sound training policy, sound implementation, and institutions and talents capable of formulation

and implementation. The training policy should be integrated with the educational policy, the manpower plans and the programmes of administrative reform within the framework of the development plan. Its course should also be integrated with the courses of other plans and programmes. The author rightly points out that “integration will positively influence the social attitudes antagonistic to vocational training, particularly when development is oriented towards industrialisation and building a continually self-productive base.

In his last chapter on “the allocation of financial resources for development” the author argues that it is essential that the allocation of financial resources should not be unguided or haphazard, nor should it neglect future demands or conditions” [* , p.168]. He calls for more extensive use of modern methods of budget preparation and the axcessive of financial controls over ordinary government agencies as well as public enterprising.

Despite its critical, provocative and pessimistic approach the book offers in its conclusion some very valuable recommendations for achieving development objectives in the OPCAP.

The author recommends that the OPCAP should first of all have the will to achieve genuine development and seek to make development administration effective. They should coordinate their efforts in formulation and implementation of objectives, plans and programmes within a unified framework far from localism. All expectations expressed by the Gulf Cooperation Council will be unrealistic unless the problem of development is given top priority: Politically, economically, socially, administratively and culturally [* , p.177]. The book concludes that:

(1) The human being should be the focus of attention as the means and end of development. The acquisition of knowledge and skill, the development of analytical reasoning and the provision of opportunity for innovation, for acting responsibly and for participation in decision-making are all essential.

(2) The media ought to provide society as a whole with the facts of the situation and make people aware of their responsibilities towards development.

(3) The political leadership must play a decisive role in making citizens aware of the problem of development so that they can participate in decision-making and be provided with the requirements necessary for such participation.

(4) Education and training should be re-examined and their aims be linked to those of development with the individual as the main focus.

(5) The civil service system should be modernised in such a way as to have people at its main focus. It should get rid of the obstructive dualisms and contradictions in order effectively to achieve its fundamental aim, namely recruitment, development and training, and the provision of appropriate work conditions.

(6) The deficiencies in the labour structure should be corrected. This can be done through planning and guided utilization of manpower, training of local cadres to take over the strategic professions and proper selection of needed foreign labour.

The above valuable recommendations turn the critical and pessimistic study into a positive significant contribution to development in the Arabian Peninsula and make the present book a valuable asset which libraries should be proud to have it on its shelves.