

**DePaul University**

---

**From the Selected Works of Marco Tavanti**

---

April 16, 2011

# Academic Civic Engagement for Capacity Building: The Role of Universities in Building Sustainable Philanthropy Through Multi-Sector Partnerships in the Middle East

Marco Tavanti, *DePaul University*



Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/marcotavanti/29/>

# **Academic Civic Engagement for Capacity Building: The Role of Universities in Building Sustainable Philanthropy Through Multi-Sector Partnerships in the Middle East**

Nesreen Akhtarkhavari, Ph. D.,  
Arabic Program - Modern Languages  
[nakhtark@depaul.edu](mailto:nakhtark@depaul.edu)

Marco Tavanti, Ph.D.,  
School of Public Service, DePaul University Chicago  
[mtavanti@depaul.edu](mailto:mtavanti@depaul.edu)

*Takaful: First Annual Conference on Arab Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, organized by Columbia University Middle East Research Center (CUMERC) and the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo, Amman, Jordan: April 16 to 17, 2011.*

## **Introduction**

The sociopolitical changes underway in the Arab world compel us to reevaluate the role of academia in building communities and societies. While education has been internationally recognized as the ‘key’ for alleviating poverty, developing communities, and promoting democratic participation (Kaushik, 2008; Ryba, 1997), little has been analyzed regarding the role of academic institutional partnerships for capacity building. In the last decade, Arab countries have experienced external and internal pressures for systemic changes, including political reforms and democratic participation. Along with Islamic movements and counter-terrorism policies, Arab nations have also seen the rise of popular movements and civil society organizations demanding democracy, freedom, and human rights (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2010). In light of the experience of educational reform and capacity building in the Arab world, this paper examines the need for international academic and community partnerships for building institutional and transformational capacity in the Arab world. Using a case study on the academic partnerships and international capacity building model of the International Human Rights Law Institute (IHRLI) at DePaul University, the paper suggests new frameworks for effective academic international

and local engagement. Academic partnerships aligned with community, state, and regional models of collaboration exemplify the manner in which educational institutions could play fundamental role in the promotion of human rights through community development (Ife, 2010).

The IHRLI case for academic civic engagement and capacity building goes beyond traditional interpretations of university-community engagement, such as through service learning or community service. Taking in consideration local needs and the cultural context, it suggests the need for external players acting in partnership with local actors as catalysts for internal changes, providing alternative (and probably more sustainable) channels for philanthropy and community engagement through multi-sector partnerships. While most international private or nongovernmental contracting agencies focus primarily on project outputs, IHRLI offers a model for sustainable impact through systems development and mutual collaborations. It suggests how 'academic partnerships' can become catalysts for achieving long-term locally-driven processes for leadership, community, organizations and institutional capacity building. Investing in partnerships between academic experts, practitioners, and local institutions and organizations in the Middle East is the key for achieving sustainable impacts on civil society and recuperating the value of public service in state institutions (Shami, 2009). The IHRLI capacity-building model offers insights adaptable in other international academic partnerships for building sustainable development through public service (public and nonprofit) institutions. IHRLI aims at collaborations with international partners that extend beyond the duration of the projects and evolve into sustainable local and regional capacity development through an extended level of global partnerships (ALOUCD & USAID, 2003). The growing trends and interests in promoting university engagement both in communities and internationally (Watson, 2011) find here a promising new model for making academic partnerships a response to the need for educational and institutional reforms in the Arab world.

## **The Cultural and Development Contexts of Arab Education**

Since the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the present time, Arab societies have placed a high value on knowledge and formal learning (Herrera & Torres, 2006). The history of Arab education is characterized by long intellectual and educational traditions promoting knowledge, research, and discoveries (Abi-Mershed, 2010; Mazawi, 2010). El-Baz (2007) asserts, “There is nothing in the Arab personality that hinders growth and achievement. On the contrary, Arab/Islamic civilization lasted for eight centuries on the shoulders of scholars and innovators in every field”. “Leaders of the Arab/Muslim civilization,” he explains, “opened their borders, their hearts and their minds to every contributor. This allowed them to preserve the findings of those who came before them. They established schools at all levels. They also supported highly advanced research centers to significantly add to the store of knowledge in every scientific and literary field” (El-Baz, 2007, p. 41).

The majority of Arabs today continue to construct their identity based on this narrative of history, augmented by the principle element of Arab culture: pride (Nydell, 2005). Halim Barakat (1993) identifies “Arabs sense of their place in history” as one of the blocks of Arab unity (p. 3). The deteriorating state of higher education in Arab countries, particularly in quality, “has become one of the hallmarks of underdevelopment by contemporary criteria. If such deterioration were to continue, it is feared that higher education would become a mechanism for perpetuating the backwardness of Arab countries in the 21st century” (Nader Fergany, 2000). Unfortunately, in the Arab region today, “the accumulation of wealth is given a higher priority and degree of respect than the accumulation of knowledge. This situation has to be reversed and more recognition should be given to those whose knowledge benefits the local society and humanity at large” (El-Baz, 2007). In most cases, research and innovation are not a national priority, and higher education is unable to meet the needs of the growing markets necessary to remain competitive on a global stage (Nader Fergany, 2000). UNESCO Assistant-Director General for Education John Daniel (2003) reports that, in numerical terms, “Arab education has made slow if steady progress in recent years, even if a good part of the expansion of school systems has

been absorbed by the rapid increase in the population of children.” He further states that the problem is not primarily numerical, but rather “ensuring the quality of education is the major challenge facing Arab states”. More attention should be paid to “whether the educational systems that they are trying to expand are properly organized to achieve the objectives that they wish to achieve”, focusing on “what is learned and how well it is learned” (Daniel, 2003).

Indeed, as Barakat (1993) observes, there is a “gap between reality and dream,” which constitutes “a highly distinctive feature of Arab society”(p. 4). However, having an idealized vision for society should not be a hindrance to development and capacity building. Instead the “dream” should be employed to mobilize Arabs to engage in a process of development and reform that returns them to their perceived past. Daniel sees signs indicating that Arab “countries are committing themselves to the renaissance (Nahdah), renewal and reform of education” (Daniel, 2003). In his 2003 address to the Meeting of Arab Education Ministers on Education for All (EFA), in Beirut, Lebanon, Daniel stated: “It seems to me that the great difference between today’s campaign for education for all in the Arab region, as compared to some other parts of the world, is that here we are talking about the recovery of a great tradition that has been lost. In other parts of the world we are trying to build the habit of education from scratch” (Daniel, 2003). He further assured the audience that the international community is committed to supporting this reform.

### **The Crisis for Identity and Interdependence in Arab Education**

In his book, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Albert Hourani (1991) suggested that crises lead to the examination of the role of different stakeholders in society. He argued that the defeat of 1967 and the changes that followed, including the increase in population, the growth of cities, the spread of popular education and mass media, resulted in a “disturbance of spirits”, a sense that the “world had gone wrong”. These changes brought new voices into the discussion of public affairs expressing convictions, grievances, and the hopes of the Arab masses, created awareness among the educated elite of their

identity, raising the question: “How could they speak to the masses or on their behalf?”. What were the “moral bonds” that tied them together as a society and a political community (Hourani, 1991, p. 443)? With the heroic struggle for independence that unified the Arabs, they could no longer blame their failures and inefficiencies on the power and intervention of the foreigner (Hourani, 1991, p. 442). Hourani concludes that the 1967 shock led to a search for identity expressed in terms of the heritage of the past and the needs of the present, connecting identity and independence. The question was whether the search for a new path that could give the Arabs direction in the modern world “should be from within their own culture, or marked for them by the outside world” (Hourani, 1991, p. 443). Furthermore, it triggered debate on whether adopting the values by which society was to live from the outside world, especially from western Europe and North America, would bring cultural dependence that might bring with it economic and political dependence. The balance between the preservation of authentic Arab culture and the adoption of Western approaches as a path to progress in the Arab world remains a lively debate in the Arab region in all its circles, public and private (Zajda, Daun, & Saha, 2009).

A new shockwave in the Arab world followed the publication of a series of Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) produced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as a response to a sense of urgency among Arabs about the precariousness of Arab countries at the start of the new millennium. Arabs were shocked and embarrassed to know that the Arab region trails behind all other regions in knowledge indicators, except a few south west Asian countries and sub-Saharan Africa (AHDR, 2003). The knowledge indicators included the number of books, newspapers, radio stations, television channels, telephone lines, personal computers, and Internet access in a typical household.

The documents gained credibility among Arabs, people, and governments because they were constructed by prominent teams of Arab intellectuals and practitioners brought together to analyze and report on the status of the Arab world. The first series of reports (2002 – 2005) examined the three most pressing human development deficits in the region: knowledge, freedom, and women’s empowerment. The 2003 Report, entitled Building a Knowledge Society, with its analysis of each deficit, addressed issues ranging

from the quality of education to freedom of opinion and expression, and ultimately had a great impact on the Arab world (AHDR, 2003). The 2003 Report asserted that only on the basis of truly knowledge-based societies can the Arab states flourish and achieve genuine human development (AHDR, 2003), and it called on Arab nations to implement reform.

The rigorous methodology, participatory processes, and well-publicized findings of the Arab Human Development Report series ensured that the Reports had a significant impact. Nader Fergany (2003), the lead author of the series stated that the report was able to “ignite a lively debate on the human development issues raised, and the strategic vision for building human development in the Arab countries presented” (Nader Fergany, 2003). He also suggested that the “debate has extended beyond official and policy-making circles to academia, the media, civil society and even ordinary Arabs in the street,” and he expressed hope that the lively debate about the report will lead to “a process of social innovation in fostering human development” in all the Arab societies (Nader Fergany, 2003).

The dramatic results of the reports, coupled with the high international publicity, stirred Arab pride and moved Arab governments to commit to taking action and implementing reform. Issues addressed in the report were discussed during the Arab League Summit in Tunis in 2004, and resolutions to address the problems were reflected in the Tunis Declaration issued at the 16th session of the Arab Summit, which included a reference to education reform in Item 2.4. It emphasized the need “[t]o consolidate comprehensive development programs and intensify efforts aimed at promoting the educational systems, at disseminating knowledge and encouraging its acquisition, and at fighting illiteracy in order to ensure a better future for the Arab young[er] generations” (Tunis Declaration, 2004). The findings of the AHDRs continue to inform the United Nations Development Program projects in the region.

### **Arab World Education and NGO Partnerships**

Nawaf Salam (2002) lists two major events in the contemporary history of the Middle East when Arab regimes allowed civil societies to gain some strength. These include the 1967 defeat by Israel, and the

Gulf Crises of 1990-91. He identifies the most important factors that led to the development of civil societies in the Arab world during the past three decades as:

1. Massive urbanization leading both to growth in the socio-economic needs of the population, with the state unable to provide the most basic needs of its citizens, including the need for education that would prepare them for economic independence.
2. The increasing number of university graduates, especially those holding degrees from European and American universities, along with the general expansion of education among Arab youth, which provided them the skills to organize and articulate their demands.
3. The recent trend of international development agencies, the European Union, and the growing number of bilateral donors who extend grants and loans directly to “vulnerable” social groups and to associations carrying out projects related to “human” or “sustainable” development.
4. The political liberalization that took place during the past two decades, which, whatever its limitations, opened up certain outlets for the free expression of ideas, and permitted social groups to start organizing and a large number of interest groups to form NGOs and.
5. The speed by which new technologies such as the internet and satellite television are gaining ground in the Arab world, which circumvents state control over information and exposes the people of the region, especially youth, to foreign experiments of change and dissent, contributing to higher levels of consciousness and to greater aspirations (Salam, 2002, pp. 10-14).

In recent years, civic institutions in the Arab world have become increasingly involved in creating a knowledge-based Arab society. In addition to advocacy work, they are making available research, reports, issue papers, training, and national and international symposiums, many of which funded by international agencies. The Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies in Egypt for example, founded in 1988, carries out its own research, advocacy and development programs. It also conducts commissioned research and provides consultation and training services to governmental and non-governmental organizations on issues of public policy, independent of the position of the state on these

issues. The Center and other similar organizations are doing so with a great risk to their operations, staff, and affiliates. As the Center's website states, in summer 2000, its founder and 27 of its researchers and associates were arrested, interrogated, and convicted for terms from one to seven years of hard labor. The Center reopened in 2003, after its members who served 15 months in prison were acquitted of all charges. In addition to the acquittal verdict, the court also asserted the Center's constitutional rights to conduct research, receive grants, and freely publish at home and abroad. This historical ruling was not just a victory for the Center, but also a forceful victory for civil society in Egypt.

Other institutions in Egypt, as well as in other Arab countries, have emerged to assist in building and promoting a knowledge-based society in the Arab world. They provide a platform for academics and other civil society actors to work together and engage a growing number of Arab youth who are aware of the problems facing society, are virtually connected to the world, are committed to the "dream" of a better Arab world, and have the willingness and the skills to initiate change.

The series of uprisings organized and led by Arab youth in Tunis and Egypt, along with the events that have since unfolded, not only changed Arab politics, but also altered the assumptions that the world had about Arabs, as well as the assumptions Arabs had about themselves and each other. The change clearly did not originate from university campuses, even though many students and faculty participated in the events. Education cannot be isolated from the other knowledge building agents of the society, or from the economic and political conditions of a nation. Ursula Lindsey (2011) attempts, in a recent article published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, to shed light on the role of faculty and students in influencing Egypt's transition. According to Khuloud Saber, a Cairo University student Lindsey interviewed, the lack of direct participation from university students and faculty demonstrates how the state and its security apparatus have tightly controlled Egyptian universities for decades.

In his essay on the status of reform in the Arab world, Farouk El-Baz (2007) suggested the following approaches specifically for achieving reform in education:

1. Share successful experiences of educational reform between Arab countries.
2. Study cases of educational reform in developing countries to learn how to implement reform in the most efficient way.
3. Define the educational topics and paths that lead to skill development and increase innovation and production.
4. Invite Western countries to help the Arab region become knowledgeable which will benefit the West by potentially reducing migration, ameliorating radicalism, and allowing the West to benefit from Arab minds in the age of global renaissance of knowledge.
5. Capitalize on the good reputation that American education has in the Arab world and continue to support partnership and the establishment of branches of American universities in the Arab World.

El-Baz (2007), further argues that there must be a “sustained partnership between the governments, private sector, and civil society to implement educational reform in the Arab world,” calling on educators, intellectuals, and the media to work together to assure such a partnership.

The DePaul University International Human Rights Law Institute has had a significant impact on the advancement of human rights in many parts of the world and the lives of many individuals. More particularly, its achievements reflect DePaul University’s Vincentian values of serving the needs of the oppressed. Its work has been both scholarly and action oriented. It did significant legal work the spiraled to include multi-partners and organizations. In addition to documenting war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and human rights violations committed in Iraq under Saddam Hussein’s leadership, IHRLI developed human rights training materials for civil society organizations recently formed in Iraq to document and report current human rights violations. While participating in the process that led to the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC), IHRLI provided financial and technical support to organizations in post-conflict areas and trained lawyers and judges on human rights and international criminal justice. In Iraq, the IHRLI has been actively participating on the post-Saddam process of state

building by connecting multiple stakeholders, training judges, building law school libraries and partnering with three universities in Baghdad, Basra, and Sulaymaniah. It recently expanded its partnerships by conducting human rights legal trainings in 20 different Iraqi universities, and building capacity with women leaders in non-governmental organizations. Through trainings and conferences, most often locally organized and regionally represented, IHRLI promoted partnerships between government agencies and NGOs, forming ongoing sustainable partnerships at the national level. The IHRLI international engagement model focuses on long-term relationships vested in human relations, service, and capacity building for a true sustainable partnership. To better understand the systemic and sustainability value of the IHRLI model we need to first consider how this method fits with the current literature and examples of international engagement for capacity building.

### **International Engagement for Capacity Building**

There are various models for international engagement for capacity building (Vallat, 2010). Clearly a durable solution for international contexts affected by poverty and insecurity will ultimately be determined by the local and regional capacities of people, their leadership, organizations and institutions. International partners can engage in a way that could positively impact this ‘indigenous’ effort for capacity building or influencing it in negative ways, promoting dependency, isolated practices and unsustainable solutions (Easterly, 2006; Hancock, 1989; Moyo, 2009). The OECD-DAC Principles for International Engagement in Fragile States (2010) set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness are a helpful reference when aiming at fostering constructive engagement between national and international stakeholders in countries that present extreme situations of poverty, insecurity, and need. The principles suggest that effective international engagements for capacity building in core institutions require strategic partnerships along with long-term visions and at least 10 years of commitment. Effective engagement programs also require that the international partners be able to “act fast, with flexibility at short notice when opportunities occur, but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance.” It requires operations and projects directly strengthening the capacity of state structures and regional organizations.

It must also “promote coherence between donor agencies and agreement on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors” (OECD, 2010).

The Institute of International Education (IIE) has been a worldwide leader in capacity building of institutions of higher education all over the world. With programs aiming at capacity building, such as strategic planning, leadership exchanges, evaluation, trainings and research, the IIE has been able to positively impact numerous academic institutions worldwide thanks to the generous support of grant money and partnerships with the US State Department, the Department of Education and the Ford Foundation. Their partnerships, which span from governments, international development agencies, foundations, universities and corporations, aim at providing networking opportunities for international development advancing economic and social capital through the engagement and leadership development of young professionals (IIE, 2011).

DePaul University also has a strong reputation and experience in international and community development. Some academic international engagement programs reflect the values of community-based international service learning or partnerships with poverty reduction and assessment of capacity building programs, like the international public service program in Manila, Philippines (Tavanti, Palencia, & Guzzardo, 2008). DePaul University has been affiliated with the United Nations DPI-NGO forum since 1997. Along with American University in Cairo, DePaul University has been a pioneer in recognizing the benefits and potentials in the academia-United Nations connections. The UN Global Compact is an example of a cross-sector partnership where universities can make a difference in the promotion of a socially responsible culture and partnerships for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Currently IHRLI is in the process of becoming member of the top level of NGO affiliation with the UN in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and it has been actively engaged in the UN with the work of M. Cherif Bassioni, IHRLI's founder, and the collaboration in the UN Human Rights Council through their international partners. The ECOSOC consultative status will create new opportunities for IHRLI to share knowledge and scale-up effective strategies in international engagement for capacity building.

## **The IHRLI Engagement Model for Capacity Building**

The approach of the IHRLI model differs from American NGOs that receive government grants in its emphases on long-term strategic multi-sector collaborations for state and organizational capacity building. Through key academic partnerships, IHRLI promotes self-administered and regionally-supported networks for capacity building. Through public and private grants, IHRLI is sponsoring large international collaborative projects benefiting academic institutions and connected local and regional NGOs, government organizations, and other key stakeholders. The institutional configuration of IHRLI as an institute under DePaul University's College of Law presents both opportunities as well as challenges for an effective international engagement for capacity building. On one hand, the academic identity provides IHRLI with extensive resources and opportunities for faculty collaboration, academic research, and academic partnership across disciplines. On the other hand, the bureaucratic and administrative process inherent in an academic community may reduce its ability to respond quickly to funding opportunities and establish formal partnerships available under the framework of an independent business or NGO.

Most academic institutions focus their international presence at four levels: international partnership and collaborations with other academic institutions for exchanges of students, faculty and resources; international teaching through study abroad and international service learning; international research through conferences and collaborative-participatory research projects; international service through international internships, consultancies and the like. Most of these projects are aimed at providing international experiences to the students or furthering the research agenda of the professors. Very few universities have focused their resources and plans toward more strategic partnerships for international development and university wide projects for poverty alleviation and capacity building (Collins, 2011; Dotolo & Noftsinger, 2002). DePaul University has a history of strategic partners with countries around the world. It recently started a strategic partnership in Haiti with the microfinance organization Zafen that engages businesses, local NGOs and the worldwide Vincentian family with their initiative for systemic

change and poverty alleviation (Hastings, Kurz, & Felix, 2010). The IHRLI model goes a step further by focusing on the development of the systems necessary for self-sustained model of development, where external-international participation becomes the catalyst for transformation and self-empowerment. Figure 1 illustrates how, in the IHRLI model, the resource mobilization, along with the strategic academic-NGOs and government strategies, becomes the ‘terrarium’ for the creation and development of ‘ecosystems’ (ISISC & IHRLI, 2006).

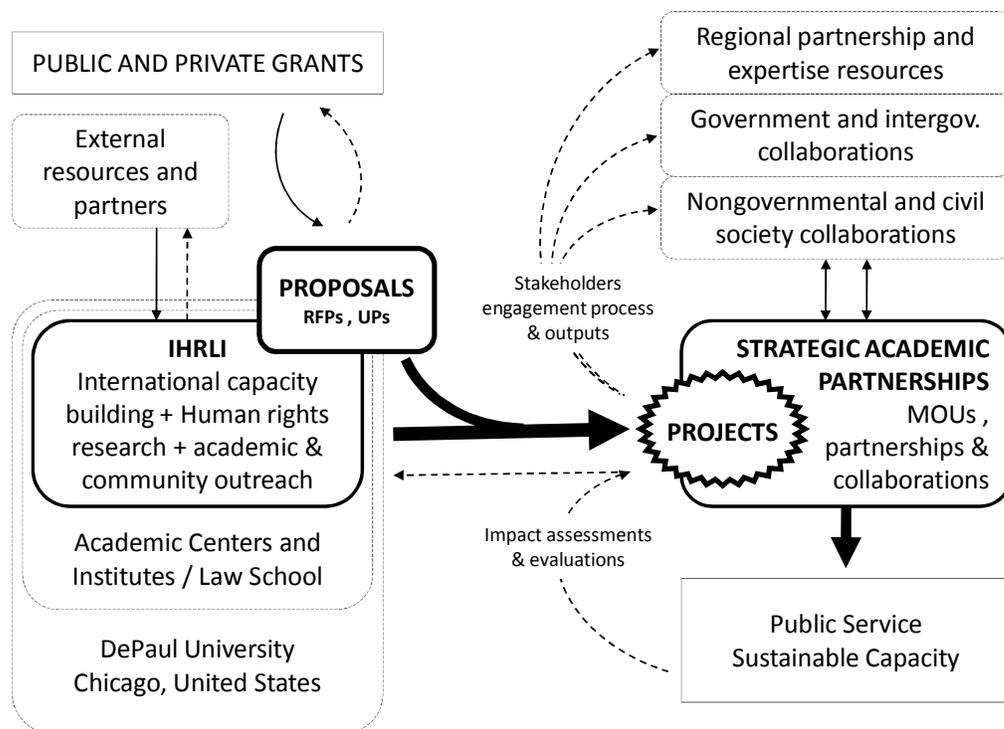


Figure 1: The IHRLI engagement for capacity model  
Tavanti and Akhtarkhavari, 2011

Columbia University's Earth Institute offers similar insights in their implementation of effective and sustainable international partnerships for capacity building in the Arab world. In their partnership with the Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), a team of academics is conducting assessment on national poverty alleviation programs. In their experiences promoting and assessing the

Millennium Villages Project (MVP) in Africa, the EI is an academic branch of the university making a difference in the life of many people worldwide. Through a poverty and social impact analysis on an area of Jordan where poverty levels exceed 40%, compared to the national average of 14%. Under the guidance of EI director, Jeffrey Sachs, the academic team is assessing the link between lack of resources and poverty levels in the effort to improve the Jordanian government's anti-poverty interventions in both urban and rural contexts.

The hopes and challenges in the field of effective international engagement for capacity building are measured by the long-term outcomes, impact and sustainability of this model. Beside the program evaluations that primarily focus on the auditing of the project itself, the social, economic, and policy outcomes of these processes need to be measured in a participatory longitudinal and technically competent way. It requires a process for developing appropriate and 'smart' indicators to measure the impact at the individual level (changing attitudes and behaviors, participation, ownership, performance, accountability and responsibility), at the organizational level (functioning capabilities, information management, organizational change, partnership, etc.), and at the systemic level (creation of "enabling environments," relationships and processes between institutions, both formal and informal).

Capacity, like sustainability, is an elusive concept that requires specific indicators for assessing capacity both as a process and as an outcome. Capacity building is also a very elusive term that requires formulating a specific matrix (Eade & Oxfam, 2000). The field of monitoring and evaluation, especially with participatory and policy oriented approaches, could be a fertile ground for further connecting the world of IHRLI with academic research mandates and resources. While a few studies have been done in assessing the impact of IHRLI's legal clinics for human rights in Mexico, the large scale of the Iraqi project and the systematic evaluation for the long-term impact of IHRLI programs on civil society and on 'enabling' systems in the Middle East could prove to be very beneficial.

## **From academic ivory tower to social engagement**

In *Beyond the Ivory Tower*, Derek Bok (1982) highlighted the ‘modern’ university’s responsibilities to adequately respond to world issues and social problems. Besides making the academic services and programs accessible and relevant beyond intellectual and class elites, the leaderships of academic institutions have the primary responsibility to engage sectors, institutions and organizations to fight ignorance, poverty, diseases and marginalization. Unfortunately, this urgency for academic social responsibility is still a vague precept in various higher education institutions that still operate with a mindset of twentieth century universities where, according to Bok, “their principal function was to provide collage education that emphasized mental discipline, religious piety, and strict rules governing student behavior” (Bok, 1982, pp. 2-3).

Charles Strain (2008) recognizes how higher education institutions, even those mission-driven institutions like Vincentian universities, follow a decision making model primarily driven by business and profit opportunities over programmatic directions for serving society and making a difference in the life of marginalized communities. “While Vincentian universities in the U.S. have adopted the rhetoric of their founder, the truth is that as social institutions they conform in their business practices to the economic system that, in its prevailing form of globalization, arguably, exacerbates the condition of poor people or, at the very least, has not decisively altered it.” (Strain, 2008, p. 169). The fact that we exclusively look at our universities as economically sustainable educational institutions prevents us from recognizing their transformational powers and responsibilities toward the local, national and international community. Clearly, whether for-profit, nonprofit, or public, universities have the primal responsibility to educate while promoting research. But the trend of incorporating market ideas about teaching, research and service (Smart, 2009, p. 294) may have dissipated the ‘ivory tower’ of academic isolation by promoting profitable marketing strategies over community engagement, policy influence and systemic change (Lepgold & Nincic, 2001). However, the primary educational mission of academic institutions does not necessarily need to be in a trade off against being relevant to policies, international relations and

community engagement (Lepgold & Nincic, 2001, p. 81). James Johnson Duderstadt, the former president of the University of Michigan, argues that universities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to become relevant to the fast changing global society, not just by following society but by positively influencing the nature and direction of a shifting world:

“Universities have long defended the thorough but slow academic decision-making process, which enables controlled change. ‘New’ programs have been built up for two centuries over ‘old’ ones in almost archeological layers. But we can no longer afford the luxury of uncritical preservations. Obsolescence lies in store for those who cannot, in some manner, adapt to our new reality” (Duderstadt, 1999, p. 3).

The principal challenge of contemporary universities is to embrace change beyond cosmetic or survival strategies, including rapid changes due to technological information, financial constraints and new market forces. Universities, with their institutional leadership, competent teaching, relevant research, and service to society, can become the catalyst for societal changes effectively responding and giving directions to new societal needs.

The question we now face is whether universities can find new models of social engagement beyond the academic excellence paradigm of the ‘high culture’ liberal elite (ivy league) model on the one hand, or the ‘knowledge transfer’ business model (market driven) model on the other, of an institution generating more trainings and profits than critical thinking and social responsible education. There are numerous examples of innovative approaches such as in the case of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, Thunderbird University’s commitment to social responsible management education, and the case here illustrated of the IHRLI at DePaul University. How can these innovative models for socially engaged and transformative education become central in the planning, visions and leadership of the academic sector? In our global knowledge societies, many universities have embraced the ‘knowledge transfer’ model to respond to the needs of the market and the changing generations of student who no longer ask ‘*is this true?*’ but ‘*what use is it?*’ or ‘*is it efficient?*’ (Lyotard, 1984). Throughout its history, however, university

adult education has always looked at 'knowledge as power' and the transformative power that conscious education can have toward liberating oppressed communities and inspiring politically and socially responsible leaders (Freire, 1985).

### **New paradigm of Academic Social Responsibility**

If education is about molding better people and contributing to building a better world, higher learning must also be about action and community engagement. Academic social responsibility (ASR) is a concept that recognizes higher education's institutional capacity, as well as its responsibility, to educate for the public good and to engage for the global common good (Tavanti & Mousin, 2008). Although implicated in the logic of market-driven consumer society, higher education institutions carry the responsibility to contribute to societal benefits in four ways:

- 1) **VALUE EDUCATION:** Providing accessible, affordable and useful quality education in disciplines and competencies relevant to the needs of society, especially the most pressing problems of poverty, marginalization, injustice, pollution and ignorance. The emphasis of ethical values, along with practical applications of sustainability and socially responsible related disciplines are the basic components of academic social responsibility;
- 2) **ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP:** Socially responsible academic institutions promote engaged types of education and research exemplified by international and community based service learning, participatory action research and social entrepreneurship education;
- 3) **INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT:** Expressed in the proper support and adequate promotion of socially responsible related programs and initiatives across curricula, research, services, operation and administration;

4) **PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPATION**: Providing the space for open debated and innovative knowledge exchanges across disciplines, through multi-sector partnerships and university-communities' long term relations (Tavanti, 2009; Tavanti, et al., 2008).

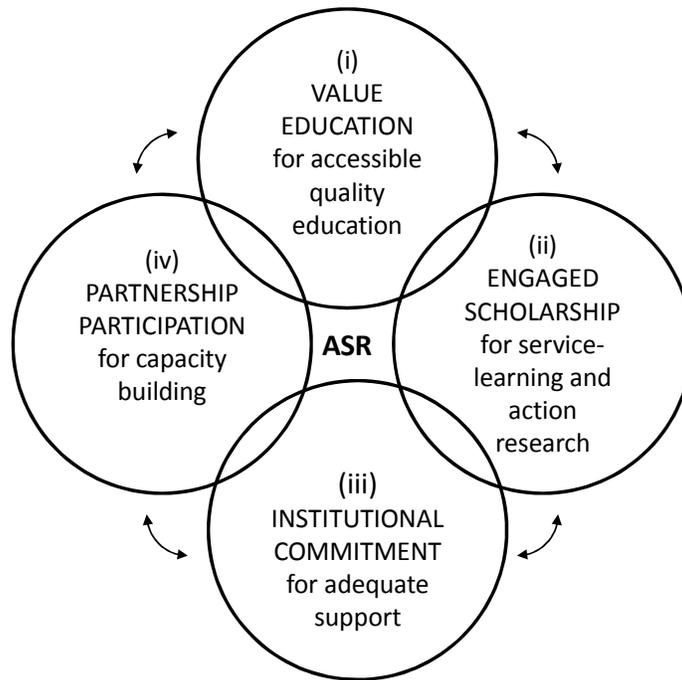


Figure 2: The dimensions of academic social responsibility (ASR)  
Marco Tavanti, 2011

Socially responsible academic institutions provide ethically based and accessible quality education, as well as institutional channels and adequate support for socially engaged teaching and research activities. They also express an institutional commitment toward the promotion of an integrated financial and organizational support for sustainable and socially responsible related programs and initiatives. In addition, a socially responsible university promotes partnerships with key academic, civil society, and international institutions that promote human rights, sustainable development, women empowerment and other fields related to social responsibility.

“Social engagement through service learning, action research, and community-based partnerships helps university students, faculty, staff and administrators dissolve the ‘ivory tower’ paradigm and transform universities into engaged institutions at the service of societal needs” (Tavanti, et al., 2008, p. 188). But such activities could be easily left on the margin of the university’s institutional commitments and may not truly reflect the comprehensive possibilities and responsibility toward communities in need.

Academic social responsibility begins from the value-commitment and societal consciousness that education bears the responsibility to inspire engaged transformational leaders. The world needs competent, innovative, sustainability value-driven leaders. Higher education institutions in the business of developing elitist leaders and bureaucrats of the status quo should revisit their social responsibility to benefitting the global community. As Bill Gates suggested in his challenging remarks at Harvard University:

“I left Harvard with no real awareness of the awful inequities in the world – the appalling disparities of health, and wealth, and opportunity that condemn millions of people to lives of despair. I learned a lot here at Harvard about new ideas in economics and politics. I got great exposure to the advances being made in the sciences. But humanity’s greatest advances are not in its discoveries – but in how those discoveries are applied to reduce inequity. Whether through democracy, strong public education, quality health care, or broad economic opportunity – reducing inequity is the highest human achievement. I left campus knowing little about the millions of young people cheated out of educational opportunities here in this country. And I knew nothing about the millions of people living in unspeakable poverty and disease in developing countries. It took me decades to find out” (Gates, 2007).

Gates suggests that leadership’s success should be measured by how much a person has done to address the world's inequities. At the same time, academic institutions’ excellence should be based on their commitment to social change and addressing social inequities. Therefore, the promotion, sponsorship and rewards in socially responsible universities should be oriented toward the dedication and success in

solving world biggest problems. In his challenging remarks, Gates addresses these questions to administrators and faculty of the university and their responsibility to rearticulate their role and criteria for measuring success. “Let me make a request of the deans and the professors – the intellectual leaders here at Harvard: As you hire new faculty, award tenure, review curriculum, and determine degree requirements, please ask yourselves: Should our best minds be dedicated to solving our biggest problems? Should Harvard encourage its faculty to take on the world’s worst inequities? Should Harvard students learn about the depth of global poverty ... the prevalence of world hunger ... the scarcity of clean water ...the girls kept out of school ... the children who die from diseases we can cure?” (Gates, 2007).

Universities are in a unique position to promote social responsibility by investing in multi-sector partnerships that engage other academic institutions, along with businesses, governments, NGOs and other civil society organizations in working together to effect positive social change. As impartial mediators and facilitators, they can bring about partnerships for promoting sustainable development, poverty alleviation, women empowerment and justice based systems for the respect of human rights. As illustrated in Figure 3 academia occupies a ‘fourth position’ across sectors and in dialogue with socially responsible trends toward the common good. While many individual organizations and institutions still resist partnerships across sectors, socially responsible universities are in a privileged position to promote already existing and promising initiatives like the United Nations global compact (UNGC). DePaul University’s School of Public Service, for example, engaged graduate students and faculty in assisting the UNDP Growing Sustainable Business initiative, now called inclusive market development (UNDP-IMD), in promoting global multi-stakeholder potential partnerships to create new opportunities and better lives for many of the world’s poor (UNDP-GIM, 2008).

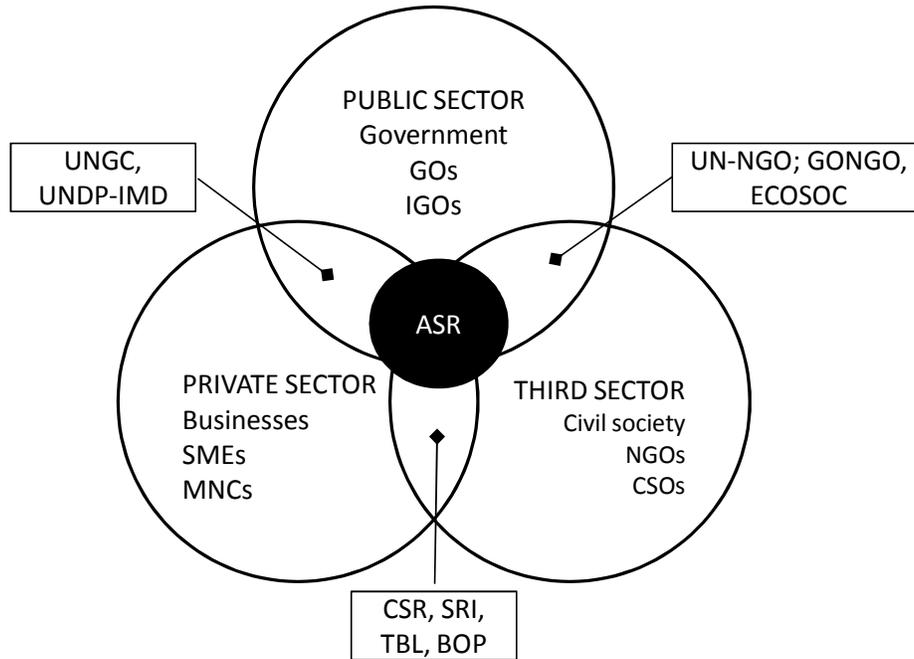


Figure 3: The 'fourth-position' of Academic Social Responsibility (ASR)  
Marco Tavanti, 2011

The role of public, private and nonprofit universities to influence citizenship capacity, democratic participation and institutional processes promoting justice and human rights is also a priority in academic social responsibility. Partnering with selected government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs), participating in the forums for NGOs at the United Nations' Department of Public Information (UN-DPI/NGO) and at The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), universities, with their centers and institutes, can make an important contribution toward working together for the greater global good.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyoo Akasaka expressed the new concepts of social responsibility in his remarks at the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) in Doha, Qatar.

“The time has come for a new culture of ‘intellectual social responsibility’ – one that takes teaching, learning and research beyond the classroom, laboratory or campus; one that harnesses its energy and promise to the search for real solutions to the real problems that are confronted by real people; and one that recognizes that to be sustainable, education must itself have the capacity to sustain.”

### **Academic Impact for Capacity Building**

The UN ‘Academic Impact’ is an initiative aiming at providing a collaborative forum where participating academic institutions can actively contribute, through a range of disciplines and expertise, to one specific United Nations objective. The forum provides the space for dialogue and collaboration with United Nations agencies and between socially responsible institutions of higher learning throughout the world. In particular, it provides a mechanism for exchange of ideas and best practice in academic engagement while directly connecting with the United Nations mandates and objectives like the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Academic Impact is informed by a commitment to support and advance ten basic principles: “1) A commitment to the principles inherent in the United Nations Charter as values that education seeks to promote and help fulfill; 2) A commitment to human rights, among them freedom of inquiry, opinion, and speech; 3) A commitment to educational opportunity for all people regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity; 4) A commitment to the opportunity for every interested individual to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the pursuit of higher education; 5) A commitment to building capacity in higher education systems across the world; 6) A commitment to encouraging global citizenship through education; 7) A commitment to advancing peace and conflict resolution through education; 8) A commitment to addressing issues of poverty through education; 9) A commitment to promoting sustainability through education; and 10) A commitment to promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, and the “unlearning” of intolerance, through education” (Academic Impact, 2010).

These general principles, which resemble the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and those of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), provide a universally acceptable guide for academic international and community engagement. The fifth principle references the aspect of academic social responsibility for building capacity in other higher education institutions and systems. The IHRLI exemplifies this commitment through university partnerships aimed at creating capacity in collaborating NGOs/CSOs and toward the promotion of a sustainable state level of capacity building.

Capacity building is a central concept in most, if not all UN agencies and it is becoming a fundamental requirement in NGO works, government priorities and private sector's operations. Although sometimes challenges in its assumptions and expectations across nations, sectors and cooperation (Kenny & Clarke, 2010), capacity building is recognized as the key for international sustainable development, the promotion of democracy, gender mainstreaming and protecting human rights (Eade & Oxfam, 2000; UNDP, 2008). Generally, capacity building is much more than training: since without capacity there is no development, capacity is development (De Grauwe, 2009). Specifically, capacity building is a process at the human, organizational and institutional level: "1) Human resource development, the process of equipping individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively; 2) Organizational development, the elaboration of management structures, processes and procedures, not only within organizations but also the management of relationships between the different organizations and sectors (public, private and community); and 3) Institutional and legal framework development, making legal and regulatory changes to enable organizations, institutions and agencies at all levels and in all sectors to enhance their capacities" (Srinivas & GDRC, 2011).

An academic sector committed to capacity building in other educational institutions, civil society organizations, businesses, and governments can become a catalyst for sustainable transformation, including regime changes (Rudner, 2009). In the case of IHRLI, the capacity building power is to effectively engage in state-university-community partnerships for improving human rights capacity, justice and governance. In the past twenty-five years numerous higher education centers and institutes

have demonstrated how their engaged activities could be a powerful force to impulse theoretical frameworks, policy directions and in the ground capacity development for human rights, peace and post conflict reconciliation (Stephens, 2009).

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

In this constantly changing world, Arab countries, institutions, businesses, and civil organizations realize the urgency for transforming their communities to a truly knowledge-based society. The debate in the Arab world remains whether the search for a new path that could give the Arabs direction to the modern world “should be from within, or marked for them by the outside world” Hourani, 1991, p. 443). A number of Arab scholars and scientists like Farouk El-Baz (2007), a distinguished Arab-American scientist, administrator, and scholar, kept their Arab convictions and still succeeded in benefiting from western technical knowledge, administrative skills, and experience in system development, which suggests that to create true reform, Arabs should invite western communities to help the Arab region become [knowledge-based]. El-Baz (2007) indicates that the Arab world will have something to give in return by allowing the west to benefit from Arab minds in the global knowledge renaissance. global age of renaissance of knowledge (El-Baz, 2007). Despite the decline in knowledge, human rights, democracy, and other indicators of progress in Arab societies, Arabs still have a rich culture and a historical mandate that constructs their dream to be contributing partners in advancing the emerging global civilization. The recent events in Tunis and Egypt, and changes that continue into the present moment indicate that Arab youth have found their place in the virtual world, adapting the knowledge and skills of others to construct their own dreams and achieve them.

Adopting the IHRLI model implies that programs operating within the context of institutions of higher education are most suitable to engage in capacity building for the construction of knowledge-based societies in the Arab world. It assumes that the relationship between the western IHRLI model and the Arab partner(s) is a full partnership based on the recognition of the capacity of involved parties and a

respect and awareness of each cultural heritage and set of aspirations. Since “capacity” is an elusive concept (Eade, Oxfan, 2000), it is critical to have clear objectives and build the joint projects on a realistic understanding of the needs grounded in empirical data to ensure that the process implemented and systems built are aligned with the actual needs of the Arab partners.

The case study of IHRLI and the need for international effective academic partnerships for capacity building suggests a new university model for civic engagement (Watson, 2011). IHRLI’s technical expertise and international experience, their approach to capacity building, and their emphasis on achieving regional long-term impacts through partnership and collaborations have consistently proved that the model works in all context, even internationally. They manifest and practice the values and principles of academic social responsibility, utilizing their ‘human rights’ expertise as a platform for action and international collaboration.

The essential features of the IHRLI model are:

- 1) Interested in long-term meaningful partnerships and sustainable community development
- 2) Both goal and process oriented
- 3) Collaborative, and embraces a culture of learning
- 4) Believe in, and manifest the values and principles of academic social responsibility
- 5) Composed of a capable and skillful team
- 6) Have significant experience both academically and professionally
- 7) Connected and have access to an extended network of resources internal (drawing from variety of academic disciplines at the university) , and external (through a network of experts, funding sources, other partners, and associations)
- 8) Have access to funding sources
- 9) Have a visionary leader with a pragmatic orientation to implementation
- 10) Enjoys a “friendly” organizational culture

11) Made up of a culturally competent, and inter-culturally skilled team.

This model recognizes universities as institutional players and responsible agents for building state capacity, systemic change and sustainable community development. It also highlights how international academic engagement invests in the local academic partners and relies on them to implement authentic transformations by acting as ‘catalysts’ for dialogue, collaboration and change among multiple agents. The model identifies factors that could benefit civic originations within the context of Arab culture, religion, and traditions, and provide the opportunity for academic institutions to enhance academic social responsibility. Within the new challenges and trajectories of academic institutions in the Arabic world (Abi-Mershed, 2010).

The IHRLI model for international academic partnerships for capacity building offers new insights for engaging academia with the rich philanthropic, cultural, and institutional capacity of the Arab world. The partnership model provides resources for building capacity and bridging collaborations across academic, governmental, and non-governmental entities. The conferences, trainings, programs and initiatives emerging from the partnerships become the vehicle that capture and disseminate knowledge, skills, and lessons learned whereby scholarly articles, official documents, and professional briefings are shared.

IHRLI has implemented and continues to successfully implement its model through university driven multi-sector engagement at local, regional, and international level. The model’s success will hopefully generate interest and contribute to sustainable democratic development in the Arab world and the world at large.

The international community and many private and public academic institutions, businesses, civic organizations, philanthropic organizations and individuals in the Arab world and the west are interested in seeing the Arab world develop. At this cross-juncture in the history of the Arab world, Arabs should continue to make meaningful and systematic reform a priority, guided by their close connection to their

needs and objective selection of reform partners. It is critical that the Arab youth are invited as partners in this reform making them vested in a society that they proved their commitment to.

## REFERENCE LIST

- Abi-Mershed, O. (2010). *Trajectories of education in the Arab world: legacies and challenges*. New York: Routledge.
- Academic Impact, U. (2010). Principles of Academic Impact Retrieved March 3, 2011, from <http://academicimpact.org/engpage.php?engprinciples>
- AHDR. (2003). *The Arab human development report 2003 : building a knowledge society*. New York: United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Arab States.
- ALOUCD, & USAID. (2003). *Higher education partnerships for global development : knowledge, cooperation, results*. Washington, DC: Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development.
- Barakat, H. I. (1993). *The Arab world : society, culture, and state*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bok, D. C. (1982). *Beyond the ivory tower : social responsibilities of the modern university*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Collins, C. S. (2011). *Higher education and global poverty : university partnerships and the world bank in developing countries*. Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press.
- Daniel, J. (2003). Education for All in the Arab World: Past, Present and Future. Meeting of Arab Education Ministers on Education for All, Beirut, Lebanon , 19-23 January 2003 Retrieved March 13, 2011, from [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=28052&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=28052&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- De Grauwe, A. (2009). *Without capacity, there is no development rethinking capacity development*. Paris: United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO). International institute for educational planning (IIEP).
- Dotolo, L. G., & Noftinger, J. B. (2002). *Leveraging resources through partnerships*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Duderstadt, J. J. (1999). *A university for the twenty-first century*. Ann Arbor, Mich.; Wantage: University of Michigan Press ; University Presses Marketing.
- Eade, D., & Oxfam, I. (2000). *Capacity-building : an approach to people-centred development*. Oxford; Herndon, Va.: Oxfam (UK and Ireland) ; available from Stylus Publishing.
- Easterly, W. (2006). *The white man's burden : why the West's efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good*. New York: Penguin Press.

- El-Baz, F. (2007). Reform in Arab Countries: The Role of Education. *Journal of education.*, 188(3), 41.
- Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, E. (2010). *Current transformations and their potential role in realizing change in the Arab world*. Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, Markaz al-Imarat lil-Dirasat wa-al-Buhuth al-Istiratijyah.
- Fergany, N. (2000). Arab Higher Education and Development, an overview. Retrieved from <http://www.educationdev.net/educationdev/Docs/arabbb.PDF>
- Fergany, N. (2003). Speech of Nader Fergany, lead author of the Report and Director of the Almishkat Center for Research and Training in Cairo. Retrieved March 14, 2011, from [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/Nader\\_Fergany.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/Nader_Fergany.pdf)
- Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education : culture, power, and liberation*. South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey.
- Gates, B. (2007). Harvard University commencement PM exercises Bill Gates. [Chelsea, Mass.]: Commencement Video.
- Hancock, G. (1989). *Lords of poverty : the power, prestige, and corruption of the international aid business*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Hastings, A., Kurz, J., & Felix, K. (2010). A Bank the Poor Can Call Their Own. *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization*, 5(4), 13-32.
- Herrera, L., & Torres, C. A. (2006). *Cultures of Arab schooling : critical ethnographies from Egypt*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hourani, A. (1991). *A history of the Arab peoples*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Ife, J. (2010). *Human rights from below : achieving rights through community development*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- IIE. (2011). Institute of International Education, International Development, Higher Education Capacity Building Retrieved March 10, 2011, from <http://www.iie.org/en/What-We-Do/International-Development/Higher-Education-Capacity-Building>
- ISISC, & IHRLI. (2006). Human Rights and Technical Assistance Projects in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Kaushik, C. P. (2008). *Education for poverty alleviation*. New Delhi: Vinayak Pustak Mandir.
- Kenny, S., & Clarke, M. (2010). *Challenging capacity building : comparative perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lepgold, J., & Nincic, M. (2001). *Beyond the ivory tower : international relations theory and the issue of policy relevance*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lindsey, U. (2011). Academics and Students Look to Influence Egypt's Transition. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/AcademicsStudents-Look-to/126353/>

- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition : a report on knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mazawi, A. E. (2010). *Education and the Arab 'world' : political projects, struggles, and geometries of power*. New York [u.a.]: Routledge.
- Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead aid : why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Nydell, M. K. (2005). *Understanding Arabs : a guide for Westerners*. Yarmouth, Me.: Intercultural Press.
- OECD. (2010). Principles for good international engagement in fragile states & situations, from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/45/38368714.pdf>
- Rudner, M. (2009). Intelligence Studies in Higher Education: Capacity-Building to Meet Societal Demand. *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 22(1), 110-130.
- Ryba, R. H. (1997). *Education, democracy, and development : an international perspective*. Dordrecht; Boston; Hamburg: Kluwer & Unesco Institute for Education.
- Salam, N. (2002). Civil Society in the Arab World: The Historical and Political Dimensions. *Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School, October*. Retrieved from <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/publications/salam.pdf>
- Shami, S. K. (2009). *Publics, politics and participation : locating the public sphere in the Middle East and North Africa*. New York: Social Science Research Council.
- Smart, J. C. (2009). Higher education handbook of theory and research. Volume 24, from <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10294525>
- Srinivas, H., & GDRC. (2011). Defining Capacity Building Retrieved March 8, 2011, from <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/capacity-define.html>
- Stephens, D. (2009). *Higher education and international capacity building : twenty-five years of higher education links*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Strain, C. R. (2008). In Service of Whom?: The Impact of Vincentian Universities' Institutional Investment Practices on Global Poverty. In M. Tavanti & C. Mousin (Eds.), *What Would Vincent Do? Vincentian Higher Education and Poverty Reduction* (pp. 167-182). Chicago: Vincentian Heritage.
- Tavanti, M. (2009). Developing Leaders While Sustaining Values: Learning from International University Partnerships. In G. I. E. Strohschen (Ed.), *Handbook of blended shore education adult program development and delivery* (pp. 157-166). New York, NY: Springer.
- Tavanti, M., & Mousin, C. (Eds.). (2008). *What Would Vincent Do? Vincentian Higher Education and Poverty Reduction*. Chicago: Vincentian Heritage.
- Tavanti, M., Palencia, M., & Guzzardo, M. (2008). Vincentian University Partnerships for Urban Poverty Reduction. *Vincentian Heritage*, 28(2), 183-203.

- Tunis Declaration, L. (2004). *Tunis Declaration*. Issued at the 16th session of the Arab Summit, held in Tunis on May 22-23, 2004 Retrieved from <http://www.arabsummit.tn/en/tunis-declaration.htm>.
- UNDP-GIM. (2008). *Creating value for all : strategies for doing business with the poor*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- UNDP. (2008). *Capacity development : empowering people and institutions*. New York, NY: UNDP.
- Vallat, B. (2010). *International capacity building: "recipes for success" : proceedings of the seminar*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit.
- Watson, D. (2011). *The engaged university : international perspectives on civic engagement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zajda, J. I., Daun, H., & Saha, L. J. (2009). *Nation-building, identity and citizenship education : cross-cultural perspectives*. [Dordrecht]: Springer.