Current Status and Challenges of Education in the Arab Region 2010

National reports on the status of education (policies, statistics, budgets, challenges, strengths) was developed by ACEA. The national reports on the current status of education (policies, statistics, budgets, challenges and strengths) were prepared by Egyptian, Palestinian, Moroccan, Lebanese and Yemeni coalitions, pinpointing national needs. These papers, have guided coalition activities, providing concrete data on the true status of education in their country, and enabling coalitions to pinpoint national needs, and mobilize the broader community to pressure authorities to meet these needs. Study findings were integrated into coalition objectives, and provided the basis for all project activities, particularly advocacy with government officials when coalitions called on their governments to enhance support to education. Broad dissemination of these important studies amongst decision makers, and at the national level in each country, provided a powerful tool and statistical basis for advocacy campaigns in the five countries.

LEBANESE RESEARCH
Prior to this project, Lebanon lacked accurate official statistics on education, and development associations did not consider educational issues a priority. The Lebanese coalition has taken powerful steps to rectify this, by releasing two important papers on education 1) Primary Issues and Problems in Education and 2) Popular Education as an Approach that fulfils the aspirations of the Palestinian people in Lebanon. These papers were presented at the launching of the Lebanese Global Campaign for Education, at the April 23, 2010 conference attended by decision makers, media and civil society organizations. These documents also highlighted the impact of the financial crisis on the educational system after 20 years of war in Lebanon.

Two more papers entitled 1) Education in Lebanon: Activating the role of Civil Society Organizations, and 2) Capacity Building in Educational and Developmental Programming, will be presented at educational seminars on December 2010 and March 2011.

Further analysis was made to the educational system in Lebanon from two perspectives, the school environment and the external environment as follows:
First: Outside School
1. Actual Illiteracy Rates: Illiteracy rates have reached 30% in Lebanon, reflecting non-application of compulsory education legislation, and community/official a lack of awareness and interest in education.
2. Marginalization of women and its impact on education: several studies indicate that the ratio of women to men is 6:1 in Lebanon, due to migration and war. Yet two thirds of those who are illiterate are female, women are still marginalized by some ethnic / sectarian parties, especially in rural areas, and women’s role is marginalized in education and the community.
3. Internal and external war: The cycle of violence has led to a community, government and developmental focus on survival, rather than education. To compound matters, ongoing internal and external violence has constrained progress on projects which attempt to promote educational reform.

Second: School Environments
1. School dropouts: Dropout rates are near 50% in elementary and primary schools, across most of Lebanon.
2. Poverty & Children Labor: The unemployment rate in Lebanon is between 15-40%, compelling many families to resort to child labour for survival; this is correlated with high drop out rates.
3. Poorly Qualified Educators: The insufficient budget allocation for public schools are correlated with the employment of unqualified teachers, at low salaries.
4. Inadequate School Facilities: Inadequate, unsafe and uncomfortable facilities in most schools, discourage students from attending class.
5. Compulsory Education laws are not implemented, largely due to government neglect, leading to low enrolment.
6. Poorly Qualified School Administrators: Most school administrators focus on financial and organizational issues, at the expenses of educational vision and programming
7. Absence of an Educational Philosophy: The absences of an educational philosophy, and the impact of this on curriculum, are primary factors in the educational crisis in Lebanon. There is a tendency for schools to neglect civic education and history, and replace them with a broad range of new subject areas.
8. Poor Motivation Amongst Students: who are aware that the effort and expense required to obtain an educational degree is unlikely to lead to a good job/decent salary.
Palestinian Educational Problems in Lebanon
Most of Palestinian refugees who stayed in Lebanon since 1967 are officially prohibited from registering in Lebanese government schools. Hence, almost 400,000 Palestinians living inside refugee camps suffer from a shortage of school buildings, poor quality education, and poverty levels which have raised school dropout rates to over 50% amongst this community.

UNRWA provides primary and secondary education to Palestinian refugees in these camps, through 74 schools, which feature overcrowded classrooms with approximately 55 students per class. Parents are not allowed to observe or participate in these schools. War, lack of investment in education, and the factors mentioned above have led to an overall illiteracy rate of 48% amongst this community.

Reasons for the poor level of education at UNRWA schools:
- Deteriorating socio-economic status
- A shortage of school buildings, and weak building infrastructure
- Poor quality school curricula
- Lack of modern technology to keep up with global 21st century educational standards
- Ineffective school administrations
- Lack of rehabilitation and training programs for teachers
- Loss of hope/motivation among youth

MOROCCAN RESEARCH
Two papers formed the basis for coalition work in Morocco. One studied establishment of the Moroccan Coalition and advocacy for public schools. This paper was very important as it shed light on Moroccan educational statistics, and establishment of the Moroccan coalition in order to activate the National Covenant on Education and Training, the national governmental reform program on education designed to enhance the status of education. The second study by the Moroccan coalition researched educational reform over the last two decades. In January, the Moroccan coalition will hold a national seminar on the status of education in Morocco, and Education for All objectives; the two papers will be presented at this event, establishing a strong basis for future coalition work. In March, the coalition will develop a third report on the status of education in Morocco as per the six Education for All objectives.
EGYPTIAN RESEARCH
A study conducted by the Egyptian Coalition found that the Egyptian education system, which is the largest educational system in the Middle East and North Africa with approximately 20.4 million students, faces two main challenges: poor quality of education, and limited budget allocations for education. Extreme centralization is a main characteristic of the Egyptian regime; the Ministry of Education's control over all aspects of the educational process (policy-making, development and implementation of strategic plans) constitutes a major problem in Egypt. This study also pinpointed use of traditional educational models as a primary factor which has hindered improvements in the quality of Egyptian education. But the most serious problem is that 14% of the general budget is allocated for education, and 80% of this is spent on running costs and salaries, leaving scant funding for educational and developmental programs.

Total public expenditure on education in Egypt in 2007/08 amounted to about 33.7 billion pounds, up 21% from the previous year, the largest increase seen during the last three years. However, despite this increase, the share of total education spending has fallen from about 17% in 1999/2000 to about 16% in 04/2005, and to 12.5% in 06/2007 to less than 12% in 07/2008. Not only that, but the real increase in the public expenditure on education during the 2008/07 is less than it seems, especially if we take into account the increase in the number of students and the high inflation rate (about 11.7% in 07/2008). In other words, the average per student spending on education has declined in current prices. In other words, the average expenditure per student has declined, given current prices. As a result, the rate of spending has also decreased from the gross domestic product (from 5.3% in 1999/2000 to about 3.7% during 2007/2008).

Other chronic problems are the poor status of school construction, and a shortage of school buildings, which results in overloaded classrooms; this in turn discourages teachers, who are already poorly motivated due to low pay, and limits access to modern educational techniques and tools.

YEMENI RESEARCH
In Yemen, studies indicated that public education faces two types of pressure: quantitative pressure related to an increase in population growth, and qualitative pressure linked to the poor quality of education. Research found that Inadequate funding for education has led to weak programs, rising illiteracy rates (especially amongst 6-14 year olds who
remain out of school), high primary school dropout rates (especially females), and limited literacy and adult education programs in rural and remote areas. This is correlated with several factors: low budget allocations and low wages for literacy program, a need for additional centers and qualified teachers, and the lack of community or media awareness campaigns clarifying the incidence and impact of illiteracy on the community.

The recent government report indicated that illiteracy rates remain high, at approximately 47.2% (25.7% in urban areas and 54% in rural areas). Although the rural population accounts for 74% of the total population, the number of students in general education (primary, secondary) in the rural areas was 1,547 thousand students in 2008/09, compared to 3,361 thousand students in urban areas (a ratio of 2:1) although the number of schools in the rural areas increased to be 13,575 schools in 2009, compared to 2,086 schools in urban areas.

High drop out rates are exacerbating illiteracy in Yemen - a complex problem which is stunting economic and social development and is correlated with several economic, social and education issues. Gender indicators highlight additional challenges, and the need for extensive reform efforts to achieve equity (given that half of the population is female).

The rates of expenditure on education of the total public spending in Yemen had witnessed large fluctuations and characterized by the lack of stability during the period 2006-2010. It has reached its lowest levels in 2008 by 13% and reached the highest levels of spending in 2010 to reach 17.7% of the total public spending. The increase in spending came as a result of increased current expenditures on wages and salaries because of workers compensation in the education sector for the rising prices and as a result of the restructuring of wages and salaries.

The expenditure on education and training from the gross domestic product has declined to reach during the period between 2003 and 2008 an average of 5.7% of gross domestic product, 5.3% in 2009, and 4.9% in 2010. That entails a big challenge of how to stop the decline in the budgets of education and increase education's share from the gross domestic product.
PALESTINIAN RESEARCH
The Palestinian coalition researched the impact of government spending on education, comparing budget allocations for education with impact, with other Arab countries, and with the right to Education for All and its role in raising the level of education for women and marginalized groups. The Palestinian study indicated that 19.4% of total public expenditure goes to education. This allocation increased from 15% in 2000 to 17.9% in 2003, to 18.7% in 2008, and 19.4% in 2009- in other words, increases in educational spending between 2003 to 2009 did not exceed 1.4% per annum. The study also demonstrated that 68% of government spending on education covers salaries/wages, 5% covers operating expenses such as electricity, water and rent, and 14% of this allocation went to developmental programs. Findings also indicated that salaries and wages in the education sector constitute 27.3% of the total wages paid to government employees (which constitute 48.4% of the total public spending). The study also revealed that the total current expenditures constitute a greater proportion of total government spending at the rate of 81.5%, while the developmental expenses and capital are only a proportion of 18.5% of total government spending.

JORDANIAN RESEARCH
ANHRE network in cooperation with a member from the National Centre for Human Rights and a member from Amnesty International (Jordan group) developed an analytical study for the Budget allocated to Education on April 2010. The study included budget analysis and examination, regarding the budgets allocated for education to the Ministry of Education from the general budgets in 2010, as well as the relation between those budgets and the capital expenditures of the development programs and projects of the Ministry of Education. The study is a set of measures that can be taken at the community and national levels. Those measures should support Education for all, while focusing on the quality of education, as well as it reminds governments of their international obligations towards education financing as an interest and increase the local resources allocated to education under the slogan "education is the key of the rights."
On April 20, the results of the study was launched in the media of all daily newspapers, the study has shown the challenges facing the educational sector in Jordan, and the most important results of the study were as follows:
a. The government reduced the spending on training, infrastructure, buildings and construction of schools and development programs, as
well as programs that addressed disadvantaged groups as a nutrition programs
b. The government reduced the budget allocated to vocational education that will increase unemployment rate among young people
c. The results of the analysis indicated that despite the increase of the number of students enrolled in public schools with about 20,000 students, the budget allocated to education has been reduced from the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 3.2% and reducing the gross expenditure estimations of the Ministry of Education to 10.17% from the gross public expenditure.
d. Lack of attention to the quality of education and limited educational resources, as well as the traditional adoption of teaching methods that let the teacher the center of the educational process
e. Low rate of teacher salaries and the absence of teachers union which protects them
f. Parents hold many hidden costs of education, which puts pressure on the family's budget
g. Low community participation in the most important decision-making that is related to education
h. A shortage of male teachers
i. The Variation of education services from one area to another and from one school to another, where there are significant differences between schools in terms of the size of classrooms, materials, equipment, teachers level of qualification, and available standards in the school buildings.

IRAQI RESEARCH
Education in Iraq is still experiencing many challenges through lack of interest by the competent authorities, especially the Ministry of Education which is responsible for the recovery process by allocating sufficient funds to secure the requirements of education and necessary infrastructure in Iraq in the context of many constraints and obstacles.

According to the Education Committee in the governorate of Baghdad that the budget allocated for education in Iraq is only 1% of the Iraqi total budget of $ 80 billion. In Baghdad, there is a need to build 3000 schools because the classes are overloaded with students as some classes contains 170 students in the same class which is considered a big problem as well as the problem of recruitment, and curriculum.

The status of educational is very bad as in 2008 and 2009 there were more than 78 thousand students’ dropouts and more than 44 thousand
students failed in baccalaureate exam and the number of illiterate is 2 million and a half people in Baghdad only.

**Rates of enrolment of students in school:**
Ministry of Education confirmed that the Iraqi provinces which mostly harmed by the current status in Iraq are the Thi-Qar, Salahuddin and Diyala, as more than 70 percent of the buildings of primary schools are either totally lacking sources or infrastructure, or the network of water are unused. However, despite all the difficulties, the overall school enrollment rate increased significantly during the academic year 2003/2004. But the survey also showed that the number of school buildings is not enough to keep up with increasing demand of education. While there are, in fact, more than 14,000 primary school in Iraq, the number of school buildings already suitable is 11,368 schools. Besides, about 2,700 of these schools are actually in need of reform and reconstruction in addition to more than 700 primary schools were damaged by the bombing - third of them are in Baghdad, and more than 200 schools were burned.

**Low enrollment of girls:**
A study has been conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Education with support from UNICEF, to collect data on students, teachers, and the conditions of buildings, kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools, and vocational schools and institutes of higher education in Iraq. The study covered the 20,000 Schools and institutes.

The study showed that among the (4.3) million children enrolled in primary schools in Iraq, there is (2.4) million boys and (1.9) million girls, a ratio similar to what it was before the Iraq war. In Wasit province, the percentage of girls enrolled is only 39% of the total students enrollment. The enrollment rate of girls scored the highest in the provinces of Baghdad and Sulaymaniyah, where it reached more than 46% of students enrolled.

The overcrowding, insecurity, lack of drinking water and sanitation facilities in schools, are considered of main reasons for the low enrollment rate of girls in addition to the fear of bombing and kidnapping.

**The role of civil society:**
The civil society institutions in Iraq paid a lot of attention towards the development of the status of education in Iraq, where the plan had been developed to combat illiteracy beginning from the governorate of Baghdad through the opening of 400 schools for literacy for adults and
young people in collaboration with the Ministry of Education for a period of three years.

The main obstacle of the work of the civil societies at school is the routine of the governmental institutions as it is a huge campaign aims to alleviate illiteracy and increase the number of literacy centers in the capital Baghdad and other provinces to a larger number in five years.