Challenges Facing the Education of Women in the Arab Countries

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The Issues of women’s education occupies a leading position in the priorities of the Arab community in the contemporary historical stage, and it is also one of the most controversial issues between the different cultural currents within the same society, this is somehow is due to the growing interest in democracy and human rights and the waves of human and intellectual liberation that is happening in the whole world under the influence of globalization, and its associated structural changes in the social and economic policies in different countries, which have a significant impact on the emergence of new challenges and opportunities for women.

The right of Arab women to education without discrimination is the basis and essence of rights and the common denominator for all human values and religious and secular laws. Because education equips women to enjoy the benefits of all rights and values. The Arab women have a lot of civil and political rights, they also have freedom to seek information, freedom of expression, freedom to vote and run and a lot of other rights, depending on their level and opportunities in education. Also, the economic, social and cultural rights such as the right of choosing employment and equal payment in addition enjoying the benefits of scientific and technological progress and access to higher education, could not be applied in a meaningful way only after women got their level of education.
Data from UNESCO for the year 2009 shows that the rate of illiteracy in the Arab world is about 30%, it is higher among women as it reaches about 50%. The highest percentage of illiteracy found in several countries such as Iraq 61%, Sudan 50%, Egypt 42%, Yemen 39%, and Morocco 38%. Statistical data about the reality of illiteracy in Arab countries show that the number of illiterates in the age groups over 15 years amounted to nearly 99.5 million people, while the number of illiterate Arabs aged between 15 and 45 years 75 million people.

The challenges facing the education of women in the Arab countries, as well as the opportunities that can be dealt with to meet the challenges and then enable and achieve fairness to women in relation to men is linked with the general characteristics of the current status of Arab women. The misery of Arab women, which revolve around a vicious circle does not lie in the denial of education, but also in the system of economic and social policies and health system and cultural values and social heritage that makes the call to improve the educational status of women is not feasible and devoid of content. As it seems that Arab women are enjoying the rotation around this vicious cycle of misery as they are considered to be not aware of their responsibilities in the defense of their rights:

1. **Challenges Associated with the Disruption of the Balance of Equality and Equal Opportunities Between the Sexes in Education**

The gender inequality in education is the most pervasive manifestation of inequity in Arab societies, because it affect practically half of the population. Although we can notice a quantitative improvement in education levels of women, and increasing rates of female enrollment in primary and secondary schools, but these achievements have not succeeded in modifying attitudes and social norms biased against women, which emphasizes exclusively on women's reproductive role and reinforce inequality between men and women in various aspects of life. This challenge has created other challenges for Arab women, including (Arab Human Development Report for the year 2000):

- More than half of Arab women are still illiterate and the rate of maternal mortality during childbirth in the Arab region is twice as high in Latin America and the Caribbean, and four times the rate in East Asia.
• Women in some Arab countries suffer from the unequal rights and legal applications, often manifested in the denial of their right to vote and election, taking into consideration that the process if taking advantage of the capabilities of Arab women through political and economic participation is the lowest in the world, this is noticed by the low percentage of representation of women in legislative assemblies and councils of ministers and in the labor force.

• Arab women also suffer from inequality of opportunities, that is evidenced by employment status and wages, and career–based discrimination against women.

• Discrimination based on gender in education still has negative consequences on women’s participation in officially–making process, decision–making and power–sharing.

2. Challenges Related to the Prevailing Culture and Social Heritage in the Education of Arab Women
The social attitudes in traditional Arab societies, particularly in rural and desert communities in addition to people in remote areas and marginalized groups is that the natural situation for women is marriage and the house life and roles apportion based on this distinction. The total of the challenges faced by Arab women linked to the ability of the education systems to impose compulsory education without discrimination and the reduction of girls dropping out of schools and the imposition of strict laws to curb early marriage of girls.

3. Challenges Associated with Participation in Public Affairs and Decision–Making
The absence of the relationship between the expansion of women’s education and their influence in making the life around them. The absence of this relationship between education and participation in political and social life associated to the system of values that still control the woman as a men follower and that the bulk of their participation in many cases are often in houses, as well as a link with some legal and political aspects and the negative cultural traditions which hinder the direct and non– direct participation of women with men in political work, which is still dominated by men with exceptions here or there. Women cannot be exempt from responsibility as they should prepare themselves for an equal participation with men in all fields efficiently and effectively, and stop the suppression of themselves for not facing their responsibilities.
4. Challenges Associated with Work and Participation in the Economic Life
The absence of the relationship between the expansion in women's education and her influence in the economic life. As the educational system in the Arab countries seeks to improve the capacity of women's educational at the same time, the system of work in the Arab economies prefers to give employment opportunities for males. Which explains the widening gap in the volume of unemployment among women compared with men.

5. Challenges Associated with the Feminization of Poverty
Arab women are known for the fragility of their situation in light of the prevailing economic and social conditions due to the low levels of education compared with men. Poverty tends to affect women more than men, and women's poverty leads to intensification of the dimension of the qualitative aspects of inequality, especially with regard to the distribution of the development qualities and inequality in access to employment in addition to the inequality in wages compared with men, it also leads to a high percentage of Arab women who live under the poverty line, and to low access of women to the social security system.

6. Challenges in the Ability of the Arab System to Promote Arab Women
Problem does not lie in the existence of laws, constitutions and legislation which promote the advancement of Arab women, but lies in the ability to implement and the existence of political wills. In this context, we must answer the following questions:
1. To what extent curricula and Arab contemporary education systems are responsive to the challenges imposed on Arab women, and how can development of public and university education, and opening the knowledge horizons with the outside world can make women able to identify and deal with the world changes, and a way out to meet the needs of the labor market?
2. Do Arab media systems work towards the empowerment of women? And how can the development of media Cadre will put the Arab Women's issues on the top of the society priorities?
3. How can one explain the reluctance of Arab women in the political participation, while most Arab constitutions give them the right to participate? What are the aspects of the
necessary legislative and legal development to activate the role of women in decision-making in all its forms?

4. What are the main skills of the new work-related knowledge economy, and how these skills can be developed among Arab women?

5. To what extent is the misconception of some religious laws an obstacle to women's practice of their role as a full partner to the man?

General Recommendations to Empower Arab Women to Face the Challenges

To meet the challenges of Arab women and to exit from the circle of misery that they have been cornered in and they cornered themselves in, and to empower and to enhance their role in public life, requires them at first to be aware of the importance of their role in society and recognizing the importance of education in improving their ability to claim their rights. And requires the Arab women to recognition the followings:

1. Identify the conventions and treaties and international legislation, regional and local human rights of women and the most important right to education.

2. Explore the opportunities available in the structural transformations taking place in the international community and particularly the globalization and the associated revolution in the world of information and communication technology which can maximize the positive aspects related to women, which is reflected eventually in the women's development and expansion of opportunities for life to have.

3. Reveal what stipulated in Arab constitutions with regard to women in general and particularly her development. That include other laws and regulations issued by each Arab state separately, either on its own initiative or in response to the requirements of decisions of international conferences for women, or even such as dealing with international pressure. And take responsibility for the commitment of these laws.

4. Search in aspects of Arab–Islamic culture, which calls in its entirety to the victory of women's rights and participation of men in all aspects of life, and carry out their responsibilities in the struggle against the aspects that impede equal participation without discrimination and with men.