Innovative approaches to reaching women, girls and the marginalized in the Arab region

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Executive Summary

This paper seeks to provide a thorough review of the situation of education in the region by identifying the major education issues affecting women, girls and the marginalized and placing them in the context of progress towards EFA goals. It is to be noted that the issue of girls, females and the marginalized in education cuts across all of the paradigms, leaving multifaceted coordinated approaches within the public and private sectors as solutions that must be explored

Marginalization
Marginalization in education is "acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities" and is determined by the following factors: education poverty – education below minimum of 4 years; income in the lowest quintile of a the country, livelihood that is pastoral or located in remote areas away from infrastructure, and last, but not least, gender. The interconnectedness of factors hinders parity and access in education: the risk of falling below the four-year threshold increases significantly if income falls within the poorest quintile; household poverty and being female further leads to marginalization, as does geographical location - gender disparities become great with distance in many countries.

The interconnectedness of attaining EFA Goals in regards to the educational attainment of girls, women and the marginalized precludes a snapshot or snippet approach and requires a look at the conditions that are holding the region back from attaining the most important goals for our discussion here: MDG Goal 2,3 and the Education For All Goals. While great gains in some areas have been made since 1999, female adult literacy; accessibility of facilities for girls; especially in rural areas; and retention at both primary and secondary levels are lagging and represent the three most persistent problems in education facing the region.

Context
Population growth continues to constrain resources the largest Arab states. Egypt is growing at 1.8% per year - 1.35 million people are added to the population each year, almost double the population of the smallest country in terms of population, Bahrain. Having a large population with low per capita income places undue stress upon government budgets, especially in reaching rural regions. Hence, when addressing impediments to education and the required innovations, one has to keep in mind the vast differences among Arab states.

Population growth and the higher than average fertility rates of the region are associated with decreased educational attainment and lower quality of life for women. In the long run the double affect of a less skilled female population and an increased number of children that fall within school age parameters is to likely to stretch the resources of many countries,

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especially the poor ones where the state has little resources, and will most like jeopardize the maintenance of present enrolment rates.

Displaced populations in the Arab world are confronted with mounting challenges such as access to food, shelter, health and education on a routine basis. To reach them, the modalities of education must be changed to incorporate new approaches that are geared to the life of the displaced: mobile or tent schools, the single school (female school), the implementation of bridging courses for returning to school children. The region hosted 4.7 million Palestinian refugees and 2 million Iraqi refugees; Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, Syria and Yemen were home to almost 3.9 million internally displaced people in 2008.

Poverty in the rural areas continues to dramatically impact educational attainment. Rural poverty is double that of urban poverty in Yemen and more than double the amount in Egypt and Sudan; in 2020, in spite of shrinking rural populations overall, Yemen and Egypt will still have approximately half of their population living in rural areas. Because rural areas tend to be pastoral, traditional educational systems are rendered ineffective; long distances and or absence of road infrastructure or transport increase the certainty of marginalization and gender disparity especially in terms of security traveling to and from to school

The region is behind all other regions in indicators of full and productive employment in particular for women and youth. While some countries in the region are progressing in the area of female employment, exceptionally low female employment-to population rates exists in the region when compared to other developing regions. In 2006, female unemployment was at least more than double the unemployment rate of men and more than six times as high in the region

Access

While all of the Arab states have declared equity in the right to education as a goal, barriers to access impact female education greater than it does male education: parents view traveling to school, especially in rural areas, as dangerous for their girls. Other barriers include lost of official birth certificates, lost of school documents from their home countries for migrants and displaced, security circumstances in some countries and restrictions on access for overage children. Fees are a major restriction to access for poor children.

Net enrollment Rates (NER) for the region are mixed. Even though Yemen has increased NER by over one-third, only three-quarters of primary age students have been reached. Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait all have approximately 88% of primary school age children enrolled, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon following at 84.6 % and 83.2% respectively, and Oman trailing behind at 72.7%. The countries that are slated to reach UPE by 2015 have high NER rates: Bahrain boasts a NER of 98.2%, Egypt 95.7%, Qatar 93% and the UAE 90.9%.

ESCWA states have made steady progress in NER; however a leveling off of progress is seen when looking at the three categories of out-of –school children: never-enrolled, enrolled late, and dropped out. Fees, distance to school, and labor demands inhibit the transition from primary to lower secondary especially for girls.

Gross Enrollment Rates (GER) range from 7 to 18% above NER rates, averaging around 12%. A high percentage of lower secondary-age students are enrolled at the primary level in these regions reflecting late enrollment. A consequence of this high percentage of late enrollers is that it may not be realistic to achieve full enrolment in terms of NER in the short to medium term. However, most recommendations for increasing the number of marginalized include that children be allowed into school regardless of whether they are in the age cohort or not.

More than 60 per cent of the primary school aged children that are not enrolled in school in the region were girls: of the 11% of students out of school in Iraq, over three-fourths are female. In Lebanon exactly half of the 16% out of school primary children are girls. Twenty four percent of the 47% out of school children in Oman are female. In the Palestinian Autonomous Territories of the 23% out of school children, 48% are female, and of the 25% in Yemen, 70% are female. Egypt, Yemen and Iraq report very high percentages of adolescent girls being out of school, totaling 82%, 64% and 61%, respectively.

With the exception of Yemen, Iraq, and Sudan, survival rates up to grade 5 range from 90 to 100 percent for the ESCWA States. In Yemen, only 66% of primary school children stay in school up to grade 5; in Sudan 70.5 % and in Iraq 80.6%. While overall transition rates to secondary education fell in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen; except for Yemen, where rates fell from 91 to 81.8, countries are successfully transitioning their girls: Qatar boasts a 100 female transition to a 98.7 transition for all students and Syria increased from 66.8 to 98.5% over the last 10 years.

Dropout rates for the ESCWA States is very telling: In Iraq almost thirty percent of school age children drop out of school, 37.9% in the Sudan and 40.5 % in Yemen. Only Yemen has more female dropouts than male - 38.8% to 43%. As we have seen before, retention is difficult, especially in countries that have heavily rural, poor areas leading to increasing numbers of the marginalized.

With such high rates of out of school children it is imperative that we rethink our retention and outreach strategies. Compulsory age groups for the region range from 6 years of age to upper range of 11 – 17 years; it has been recommended that some countries might consider increasing the duration of compulsory education to include lower secondary education.

Equity
The Gender Parity, as measured by an index figure of .97 -1.02, for primary enrollment has been achieved for most of ESCWA states, with the exception of Iraq and Yemen at .86 and .76 respectively, and Egypt at .96; data is not available for Syria and Sudan. All of countries within the parity range in 2007 had already achieved parity by 1997. However, equity as related to access opportunities seems to be satisfactory in most countries, other dimensions of equity in terms of quality seems to be of a concern.

Quality
Indicators suggest that a poor quality of learning is taking place in the region, affecting skill development and negatively impacting labor force development and quality, and consequently, economic growth. Traditional approaches and methods of teaching have to be reexamined to make education relevant to the student's life and to marketplace trends.

This especially holds true if we look at quality as a determinate of survival up to grade 5, retention, and enrolling in school. Teachers may not be engaged in dialogue during the learning process; students are expected to write answers on standardized tests that may have no connections to their background or individual location; curriculum may have not relevancy or is not applicable to the lives of the children or their families. If the curriculum and the method delivery are ineffective in holding the students interest in attending school against the competing demands of work, household duties, and other economic and societal pressures, enrolment and retention suffer.

External international assessments point to a need for new way forward. The results of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2007 for eighth grade students in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Palestinian National Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates (Dubai) were not promising. Students in these

states had achievement levels below those of other countries with similar income levels. Only Jordan and the UAE scored above 400, the lower threshold of achievement.

Adult literacy measures how well the educational system works in the long run. An estimated 29% of the adult population in the Arab States, or 58 million people, lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed in everyday life. Egypt, Yemen and Sudan have extremely high illiteracy rates; Egypt ranks in the top ten countries in the world for numbers of illiterate adults at 17 million, or a third of its adult population. Sudan and Yemen each have 5 million to 10 million adult illiterates.

The region is losing the battle to fight adult female illiteracy. Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, and Egypt have female literacy rates that are anywhere from 37% less than those of males in Yemen; 19% less in the Sudan, 20% less in Iraq and 17% less in Egypt. In 2015, Yemen is expected have only 55% of its female adult population literate.

Funding for education is varied within the region. The share of GNP devoted to education average approximately 5%, ranging from 1.6% in the United Arab Emirates to 6.7. In 2007, the share of education in government budgets ranged from 9.6% in Lebanon to 31.1% in Oman, where it had increased by ten percentage points since 1999. However, the rate of return on investment in the education sector is low in terms of average number of schools per year and contribution to overall educational quality.

In summary, the countries covered by this review has made significant progress toward universalizing basic education for all children and made remarkable progress toward achieving gender parity.However in examining the rate of progress it is noticed that over the last few years most of access, equity and equality indicators have been leveled-off.This means that the current policy frameworks have to be revisited to adopted innovative approaches to reach those are difficult to reach for schooling especially marginalized children.

Overall Success MDG Goals 2 &3 and Education for All
MDG Goal 2: Universal Primary Education (UPE)
UPE attainment is measured by Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) in primary education, the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach the last grade of primary school, and the literacy rate of 15–24 year-old men and women. ESCWA countries have taken dramatic strides in the past toward achieving UPE in terms of NER for primary education and youth literacy efforts for most of the countries have been successful.

Bahrain, Egypt, Qatar, and Syria are projected to reach UPE before 2015. However, over the last two to three years, progress has leveled out. According to the Global Monitoring Report 2010, by 2015 Lebanon will have attained only 99%, UPE, Kuwait 97%, Iraq 94%, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories 94%, Jordan 90%, Saudi Arabia 89%, and Oman 83%. Lebanon is the only country, of those who have not yet reached UPE that is expected to do so by 2025.

Reasons vary for this trend. Overall, youth literacy efforts for most of the countries have been successful. By 2015, the youth of all of countries will be at least 90% literate (when we look at female youth literacy, for 2000-2007, only 67% of female youth in Yemen were literate and only 83 will be literate by 2015). Although Iraq stands at 88.6 NER and .86 GPI, the survival rate to last grade of primary education is only a slightly over seventy-percent. Sudan and Yemen have suffered decreases since 1999: Sudan from 77.1% to 62.1% primary education survival rate and in Yemen the number of children completing their primary education fell from 79.7% to 59.5%.

MDG Goal 3: Gender Parity.

ESCWA states are on track in terms of female education enrollment: the Gender Parity Index for Primary Enrollment has been achieved for most of the region, with the exception of Iraq and Yemen at .86 and .76 respectively, and Egypt at .96 (data is not available for Syria and Sudan). For all countries for which there is data, other than Bahrain, the female share of tertiary education exceeds, sometimes by a wide percentage, that of males fulfilling

Other indicators are lagging far behind. In terms of female political representation, Arab States have not progressed to close the gender gap. Even in the countries that are considered more socially "liberal", such as Jordan and Lebanon, show only a 6% and 5%, representation of female parliament members.

Women still tend toward gender-based roles of caring for others, such as teachers, which are less valued in the labor market. Egypt, at 36.9% (in 2005), ranked first in the percentage of women working in non-agricultural sectors; in Jordan, Syria, the UAE and Iraq approximatley twenty percent of females work in other sectors, and the Sudan and Bahrain both have 18% of the female workforce in non-agricultural sectors. For the Gulf countries of Oman and Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, a negligible percentage is working in other sectors

Education for All
MDG trends are mirrored when addressing the ability of states to attain EFA. Current education policies are not retaining those who are in school, nor reaching out-of school children that are not documented in the NER statistics.

The EFA Development Index looks at universal primary education (Goal 2), adult literacy (first part of Goal 4), gender parity and equality (Goal 5), and quality (Goal 6) to measures access, equity and quality in order to determine how countries are doing in meeting their goal: Currently no ESCWA countries hold the status of having achieved EFA (EDI between 0.97 and 1.00) however, Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates are ranked as being close to EFA (EDI between 0.95 and 0.96. In an intermediate position (EDI between 0.80 and 0.94) are Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian Autonomous Territories, and Qatar.

The other five ESCWA countries are furthest from attaining EFA and performed poorly on all four indicators. Low adult literacy rates in Yemen and Sudan is the predominate reason; recent declines in enrolment in Oman and the Palestinian Autonomous Territories lowered their EDI; and in Iraq, the gender gap also played a major part.

Innovative Programs and Recommendations
Innovative programs that are improving access, equity and quality education to girls, women and the marginalized provide insights into possible project replication and adoption. These programs implemented in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and in some other countries were successful in boosting education enrollment , retention and quality for girls and other marginalized groups. However scaling up some of these innovations require careful analysis of many contextual factors as well as institutional factors.

Key Questions for discussion - General

1. What are some of the innovative approaches used in the region to reach girls and to increase not only their attendance but also learning in primary and secondary education?

2. How can literacy levels among girls and women be increased and associated with relevant learning and life-skills programmes?

3. What can education policy makers do to scale-up existing innovative approaches around the region to reach women and girls in education?

4. How can regional and/or international mechanisms assist to share and exchange good practices around the region, especially to those countries which face multiple challenges?

5. How can policy-makers ensure that innovative non-formal education approaches are integrated with the education systems to ensure coherence and sustainability?

6. What are some of the enabling factors which are necessary to implement innovative approaches, especially non-formal education approaches? (Eg. Legal frameworks, private-public partnerships..)

Access
- What measures can be employed to mitigate the impact of poverty on education by increasing and stabilizing incomes and food security of poor households?
- What are the key challenges in helping the marginalized overcome poverty? What role can education play?
- How can investment within the education sector be better targeted to support poverty reduction?
- What structures can organizations put in place to mitigate low survival rates in conflict areas? What policies can governments institute to do the same?
- What innovative educational approaches can be put in place to accommodate displaced and migratory populations?
- What policies can be implemented to reach out to specific populations – e.g. rural and under-served communities, to improve their schooling, especially through non-formal and informal education?
- What incentives can be instituted that would allow school systems to eliminate direct and indirect school fees?
- If UPE is not attainable for some countries, what new or different measures can be taken to maximize primary enrolment?
- What of the six goals should take priority in developing policy and programmes?

Equity
- What measures and new approaches can be taken to combat declining female literacy rates in the face of increasing population growth?
- How do we encourage women to enter non-traditional careers such as the scientific professions and technical occupation?
- What can be done to promote investment in female and marginalized education as part of national development strategies?

Quality

- What policies can be implemented to increase lower secondary retention?
- How can the transition from primary to secondary school be made smoother? Is testing an issue?
- What strategies can be undertaken to reach all three categories of out-of-school children?
- What kind of support can be given to families of children who are not enrolled in the education system? What policies can be promoted to entice enrollment?
- How can pre-primary education be implemented in systems as a method of primary and secondary retention?
- What can education policy-makers do to integrate lifestyle relevant curriculum into education planning and practice?
- What bridges can be made between formal and informal education systems?
- What types of education pedagogy can be used to promote community collaboration to create better schools and communities?