



# Global Youth Action Network

## Arab Youth and WPAY, Challenges and Success 1995-2005: A Regional Overview

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\*N.B. The papers presented by Egypt and Jordan have been drafted in Arabic and what is viewed in this document is the translation of the Lead Author. The papers presented by Yemen, Kuwait and Morocco have been summarized for the purpose of this overview.

## INTRODUCTION

### Youth In the Arab World: A Call for Engagement

According to a questionnaire conducted by the United Nations Development Program for the Arab Human Development Report (2001), over 51% of Arab Youth have the ambition to immigrate to a Western State in pursuance of a better life style and equal opportunities for jobs and better pay. This statistic tackles a major obstacle that faces youth in the Arab World-no opportunities and the lack of ambition for a prosperous future in their native lands.

The demography of the Arab World proves that it is a "youthful society" over fifty percent of the population is below the age of 25, and although the world will be struck with the problem of "ageism" where this demography will shift and the world will witness a generation that is made up of people who are primarily over the age of sixty, the Arab World, due to fertility rates, will continue to be a "young society".<sup>1</sup>

Though the *World Program of Action for Youth for the Year 2000 and Beyond* has clearly stated the rational on the importance of including youth in decision making and becoming active agents of change and development in their societies, Arab States continue to overlook the importance of the participation of young people. Thus, this group has brought a new rational that fits the context of what the Arab World goes through today, we believe that young people in the Arab Region should be given the right to participate because:

- 1) The demography of the region suggests that we are both the present and the future of this region.
- 2) We are not the ones that create problems, and to nurture our abilities and mentor us to become more aware and engaged citizens is the key to change.
- 3) We are Creative, Able, Continue to Promote New Ideas, and were able to overcome all obstacles that have faced us and have become pioneers in the fields of management, culture, art, science and technology and the various divisions of human development.
- 4) We face ideologies of the "old school" that needs to be changed in this society, such as: Youth are not mature; they need those who guide them and provide services to them, Are not able to handle their responsibilities, Are not educated well enough and lack the skills that make them ideal citizens which enable them to contribute to their society.
- 5) Failing to Listen to us and engaging us in issues that we face, and continuing to keep us away from the decision making processes has and will continue to create wide-range catastrophes be it political or social.

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<sup>1</sup> *Arab Human Development Report, UNDP 2001*

## Youth Policies in the Arab World

Through the research conducted for this overview, it has become quite clear to us that all Arab States have youth policies that tackle some priority areas of young people in the Arab World, however, implementing these strategies has continued to be a difficult matter because of:

- 1) Continued conflicts between Arab States and the Arab-Israeli Conflict which prevents decision-makers to look into social policies as a priority in parallel to political matters.
- 2) Poor economical planning which has resulted in some of the highest unemployment rates in the world.
- 3) Continued focus on sports and not on priority areas for young people as outlined in the World Program of Action for Youth.
- 4) Lack of solidified youth programs and strategies, which do not include young people as planners, implementers, and evaluators of such programs.
- 5) Lack of understanding of the essence of civil society, which does not allow civil society organizations to take on an active role in overseeing the implementation of such policies, in cooperation with the official governmental agencies.

To give a more in-depth analysis, this report will focus on analyzing the situation of youth in the following countries: Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Yemen in addition to the Pan-Arab Policy on Youth and Sports as adopted by the Council of Youth Ministers in the League of Arab States. It is important to note, that the only country which adapted the format outlined by the UN Program on Youth's toolkit was Yemen, as the contributors from other countries were not able to create open forums for young people.

### ▪ PAN-ARAB POLICY ON YOUTH AND SPORTS:

This policy was adopted by the Council of Youth and Sports Ministers in the League of Arab States on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1983 and then amended on January 30, 2001. The Policy is separated into different parts which include: Rationale Behind the Formation of the Pan-Arab Policy on Youth and Sports, The Arab Definition of Youth, Principles and Objectives of the Pan-Arab Policy on Youth and Sports, Aims of the Policy, and Areas of Engagement. In order to shed light on this policy, the following synopsis has been derived:

-The rationale behind the formation of this policy is due to the current world order and because Arab governments have come to understand that a unified policy on youth and sports is necessary to ensure the sustainability of developing the strengths of young people.

-The Arab term youth is to include both young men and women, and the age of "youth" is defined as 15-25 in compliance with the international understanding of this age group. However, it is to be understood that each Arab country has its own individuality and freedom to extend the group to after twenty-five in accordance to the need of this age group in a specific country. In addition, it is important not to neglect the age group of 12-15 as the entry into the age of youth.

-The principles of the policy are based on:

- 1- *The Arab-Islamic Heritage*
- 2- *The Current Situation of the Arab World*
- 3- *The essence of democracy*
- 4- *Equality*
- 5- *Scientific Method of Implementation*
- 6- *Group Responsibility*

-The aims of the policy are based on:

- 1- *The National Upbringing of Young People:* Raising young people that believe in God, and the importance of the unity of the Arab people.
- 2- *The Unity of Arab Youth:* Creating an understanding that young people share the same roots and have the same heritage and to be united as brothers facing all obstacles.
- 3- *Introducing Ethics into the program areas of youth and sports:* The ethical understanding of a unified Arab people, respect of each other and understanding the importance of creating programs that introduce an able, and well-educated generation of young people.
- 4- *Investing in Young People's Energy:* To create volunteers who aid the development of their society.
- 5- *Palestinian Youth:* Special emphasis is given to Palestinian youth who are the fore-front of the Arab-Israeli conflict and to support their just cause of restoring their occupied land.
- 6- *Special Categories:* The importance of giving special attention to: Talented Youth, Handicapped Youth, Academically Excelled Young people, Immigrant Youth, Marginalized Young People.

-The Areas of Engagement Outlined in the Policy are:

- 1- *Culture:* Engraving the idea of religion and national unity, and is the main area of engagement for young people.
- 2- *Arts:* Encouraging young people to go into this field as a method to expand your horizons.
- 3- *Physical Education:* Encouraging young people to express themselves through sports.
- 4- *Scouts:* Encouraging young people to take on this important methodology as a means to guide their understanding of the other and to give back to their community.
- 5- *Military Service:* Named as main pillar as it introduces the feeling of defending

their nation and country and creates discipline as a method of running their lives.

6- *Volunteering Camps*: Working to give back to their community be it on the local or national level. This aims to engage young people in the issues that affect their community, country and region.

7- *Youth Houses and Travel*: As a means to expose young people to the various Arab countries, peoples and heritage.

8- *Good Use of Free-Time*: Engaging in resourceful methods such as the Arts, Education, and Volunteerism, to mold their character as to be positive and ideal citizens.

9- *Media*: Engaging young people's in the media by participating in various volunteerism, cultural, and artistic programs in accordance to youth capabilities.

10- *Use of the Internet*: Training programs to make young people accustomed to the use of the internet.

11- *Adolscents*: Creating programs which fit the specific needs of this age group.

▪ **CRITICISMS ON THIS POLICY:**

It is important to note that although this policy has many fallacies, the mere existence of a unified Arab policy on young people is an achievement. This policy in itself is a realization that youth are an important fraction of the Arab Society. This policy, however, needs to be adapted due to the following reasons:

- 1) Does not coincide with the *World Program of Action for Youth in the Year 2000 and Beyond*.
- 2) Does not address the real issues that face young people in the Arab Region such as: Employment, Involvement in Decision-Making, and Rising Number of Drug Misuse among young people and the relationship of young people with other generations.
- 3) Does not state the importance of having youth as pivotal elements to the success of this policy, and does not include them in the formation of the policy.
- 4) Does not state a modality of execution/action plan which ensures the success of this policy-meaning translating this theory into projects that can transmit this policy from a theory to a reality.

## The Situation of Egyptian Youth

By: Ms. Delia Al-Zeni

### ▪ General Information:

- Youth Population in Percentage: 20.5%
- Median Age (Years): 22.2
- Youth Focal Points: The Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (Governmental and NGO).
- Total Illiterate (15+): 48.6%
- Total Unemployment: 11% (registered)

Egyptian Young people today face a serious issue of marginalization due the social and political pressures that they face. As a result, there are many factors that pose as a obstacles to their empowerment, which include:

- Economical Barriers*: High Unemployment rate and the increase of inflation.
- Social Barriers*: Lose of identity, the increase of population and the increase of the digital divide which induces more problems between the various fractions of society.
- Political Barriers*: Constraining the right of expression and the continued quarrel between the government and opposition.

### **Important Obstacles that Face Egyptian Youth:**

- 1) Increasing number of illiterate youth.
- 2) Increasing number of unemployed youth.
- 3) Increasing number of youth living below the poverty line.
- 4) Lack of understanding from Adults to the needs of young people.

### **Recommendations to the Egyptian Government:**

- 1) Creating new job opportunities for newly graduates which fit their ambitions, with sufficient pay.
- 2) Understanding that Education is not the means to getting a god job, as it is an important method to create a generation of good citizens.
- 3) Inclusion of youth in re-evaluating the national youth policy which should focus on youth in parallel to sports.



## The Situation of Jordanian Youth

By: Ms. Leila Younis

### ▪ General Information:

- Youth Population in Percentage: 21.1%
- Median Age (Years): 18.3
- Youth Focal Points: Ministry of Youth (Governmental) National Union of Jordanian Youth (NGO)
- Total Illiterate (15+): 10.2%
- Total Unemployment: 15%

The government of Jordan has taken important steps to ensure the development of the youth sector. Recently, the Higher Council for Youth and the United Nations Development Program signed an MOU which tasks UNDP with the formation of a National Youth Policy that fits the needs of Jordanian Youth. Young people are being included into this process by the answering of questionnaires which will outline the areas of importance according to them.

Civil Society organizations are being directed by the Ministry of Youth to have a youth section in their program areas. Jordan has also witnessed the emergence of many youth organizations and the National Union of Jordanian Youth and the Higher Council for Youth are planning a mechanism to unite these organizations in a special forum.

The government has also recently launched an initiative chaired by HM Queen Rania Al-Abdallah to introduce technology as a means to update the educational system in the country.

### **Important Obstacles that Face Jordanian Youth:**

- Patriarchal Society which forbids the emergence of neutralized relationships between youth and older generations.
- Increase of unemployment among youth which forces them to look for jobs in other countries.
- Youth are not integrated into decision-making processes on the governmental and civil-society level.
- Growing problems that face young people due to the neglect of young people's problems in the past years.

### **Recommendations to the Jordanian Government:**

- Creating a database of youth related projects executed by the government and civil society organizations.
- Creating a youth parliament/entity composed of young people to take charge of youth affairs.
- Incorporating the ideas of democracy and freedom into the educational sector.
- Promote inter-generational dialogue starting with the institutions of the family and education.
- Creating promising jobs for newly graduates.

## The Situation of Kuwaiti Youth

By: Mr. Mohammed Al-Ghanim

### ▪ General Information:

- Youth Population in Percentage: 15.3%
- Median Age (Years): 23.1
- Youth Focal Points: General Council on Youth and Sports (Governmental) National Union of Kuwaiti Students (NGO)
- Total Illiterate (15+): 18.1%
- Total Unemployment: 10%

The Kuwaiti government has recently created a Higher Council for Planning and Development which is also tasked with the youth policy in the country. The government does not include young people in planning, implementing and overseeing their projects. On the political level, youth below the age of 21 are not allowed to vote and are not allowed to run for a seat in parliament before the age of 30.

The government focuses primarily on sports and neglects the cultural, educational, and social priorities of young people. The scouts movement in Kuwait is extremely strong and this is due to the support of the government. The Student Unions have been recently registered as an official NGO and it is a very democratic and representative organization, however, it does not have any real effect on youth policies beyond the university.

### **Important Obstacles that Face Kuwaiti Youth:**

- Increase number of unemployment and the government has not shown seriousness in solving this problem.
- Poor quality of education.
- Increase number of drug addicts and no scientific method to deal with this social problem.
- Lack of political and social participation, as civil society itself is not respected nor supported by the government.
- Lack of understanding between older and younger generations which continues to cause a problem between the family.

### **Recommendations to the Kuwaiti Government:**

- Re-evaluate the National Youth Policy in full cooperation with young persons.
- Readapt the educational policy to include Sexual and Reproductive Health, Democracy and Human Rights.
- Creating Internship opportunities to allow youth on-hands experience making them more qualified applicants for their future jobs.
- Creating a representative body of young people to oversee youth policies in cooperation with the government.

## The Situation of Moroccan Youth

By: Mr. Saad Shasho

### ▪ General Information:

- Youth Population in Percentage: 21.2%
- Median Age (Years): 22.8
- Youth Focal Points: Ministry of Youth and Sports (Governmental) General Union of Moroccan Students (NGO)
- Total Illiterate (15+): 51.2%
- Total Unemployment: Unknown

Moroccan Youth are faced with serious challenges that need to be tackled. Although the government has taken serious steps to ensure their participation, such as: The General Union of Moroccan Students as the focal point for youth in university, the formation of the Moroccan Children's Parliament etc...Nevertheless, the National Youth Policy is not known to many young people and does not translate the actual needs of young people.

The government has continued to express its hopes to help young people and has transmitted this willingness by hosting the World Youth Congress held by Peace Child in 2003, the Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Youth Conference held in Rabat in 2001. These forums are excellent exercises of democracy and expression. It is important to note that achievements in the field of young people have been noticed, such as: the formation of the National Forum on Young People, and the reduction of the voting age to 18.

### **Important Obstacles Facing Moroccan Youth:**

- High Numbers of Unemployed Youth
- Due to the first point, high numbers of youth who immigrate illegally to European countries.
- High number of youth struck by HIV/AIDS.
- Participation of young people in forums does not translate into their inclusion.

### **Recommendations to the Moroccan Government:**

- Introducing Sexual and Reproductive Health into education in hopes to raise awareness to the rising problems of HIV/AIDS.
- Translate the recommendations of the forums held for young people into actual strategies and action plans.
- Creating job opportunities for young people to avoid problems with foreign countries as is the case now.

## The Situation of Yemeni Youth

By: Ms. Catherine Briggs Hanfai

### ▪ General Information:

- Youth Population in Percentage: 19.8%
- Median Age (Years): 15.8
- Youth Focal Points: Ministry of Youth and Sports (Governmental), General Union of Yemeni Students (NGO)
- Total Illiterate (15+): 53.6%
- Total Unemployment: Unknown

The following brief and informal report is the result of a questionnaire process which focused on asking a non-randomized selection of young people, mainly male and female students 24 and under in the capitol city of Sana'a, to prioritize their "top 5 most important" issue areas for young people in Yemen. The questionnaire was created and carried out as a voluntary endeavor in consultation with a small committee of physicians specializing and/or interested in youth.<sup>2</sup>

The brief questionnaire's list of topics included 11 of the 15 areas of the World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY), with one or two titles slightly adapted by the committee. Most of the four remaining WPAY topics were 'folded into' the short descriptive text of one of the 11 listed topics (example: HIV/AIDS was included in the descriptive phrases explaining the health issue area). The brief descriptive text for each issue area was taken directly either from the WPAY or the online Toolkit.

The questionnaire was one page (in English) or slightly over two pages (in Arabic). For both questionnaires, the 11 topics were listed alphabetically. Within the group of 24 yrs and under respondents [n=99], 16 completed the English questionnaire and 83 completed the Arabic questionnaire. Most of the individual youth respondents were students in Sana'a. Many respondents listed an order of priority for all of the 11 items, but emphasis in this brief report is given to the top 5 areas of priority. A supplemental response set is also included, of respondents who wished to indicate their opinions and/or work with youth but who are over 24 years old [n=12].

## RESULTS:

### A. Respondents 24 years and younger

***1. The 11 topic areas and the number of respondents who marked that area as the #1 most important area for young people in Yemen - results for all 11 topic areas are listed here; each topic had at least one respondent identify it as what they considered their top priority for youth]***

Education - 37

Health -14

Environment - 12

Employment - 10

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<sup>2</sup> The committee included Drs Mai Al Moaid, Jamela Al Raiby, Salwa Al Eryani, Anhar Abdulwarth and Catherine Briggs Hanafi, with the important assistance of Sina Salam.

Hunger and Poverty - 8  
Drug Abuse - 4  
Girls and Women - 4  
Intergenerational Relations - 3  
Youth at Risk - 2  
Youth participation - 2  
Leisure Activities - 1

**2. The topic areas most frequently identified as one of the top three most important areas for young people in Yemen, in the opinion of the respondent. That is, this result includes the number of times that particular area was marked as either priority #1, #2, OR #3.**

Education - 67  
Health - 46  
Employment - 39  
Environment - 29  
Hunger and Poverty - 27  
Girls and Young Women - 24

(all other topics had less than 15 votes for the top three priority areas, as follows; Leisure Activities: 13; Drug Abuse: 8; Youth Participation: 8; Youth at risk: 7, and Intergenerational Relations: 3)

And finally,

**3. The topic areas most frequently identified as within the top five most important areas for young people in Yemen:**

1. Education - 74  
2. Health - 69  
3. Employment - 65  
4. Environment - 46  
5. Girls and Young Women - 45  
6. Hunger and Poverty - 42  
7. Leisure Activities - 39

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Drug Abuse - 26  
Youth Participation - 25  
Youth at Risk - 10  
Intergenerational Relations - 10

B. Respondents over 24 years old

**1. The topic areas identified as the #1 most important area for young people in Yemen, with the number of respondents for each:**

Education - 8  
Hunger/poverty - 2  
Health - 1  
Girls and Young Women - 1

**2. *The topic areas most frequently identified as within the top three most important areas for young people [marked as #1, #2 OR #3]***

Education - 12

Health - 8

Hunger/poverty - 6

Employment - 5

Environment - 2

(And 1 vote each for topics: girls and young women, intergenerational, and leisure)

**Conclusion**

The positive interest in the questionnaire and in the topics on the part of the young people participating is no doubt an indication of their potential to take further actions on the priorities they have chosen. It is hoped that this small report will both further assist the Global Network for Action on Youth, along with other reports from Yemen, in their review process for the WPAY. In addition, it is hoped the project and the resulting information and follow-up<sup>3</sup> will assist everyone involved with youth efforts in Sana'a and nationally to continue involving young women and young men in the ongoing progress toward Yemen's "National Strategy for Integrating Youth into Development"<sup>4</sup>, and especially in efforts related to their priority areas of concern.

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<sup>3</sup> One result of the committee meetings on this project was the initiation of a yahoo resource/discussion group "Youth In Yemen" – if any readers are interested in joining this group please email [cbhanafi@yahoo.com](mailto:cbhanafi@yahoo.com)

<sup>4</sup> The National Strategy for Integrating Youth into Development, Republic of Yemen Ministry of Youth and Sports with the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides Association and UNFPA, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2002.

## CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

As noticed in this overview, many Arab countries suffer some of the same obstacles. Most importantly, it can be induced that the main issue is not giving young people a voice. Because young people are not allowed to participate actively in their societies, and most importantly in matters that affect their daily lives.

This report has reviewed five Arab countries in addition to the Pan-Arab Policy for Young People, and has addressed the obstacles and recommendations to solve these obstacles in accordance to youth perspective.

In end, we would like to present the following recommendations, which we feel are essential to the empowerment of young people in Arab world:

- **Developing the Skills of Young People:**

1-Creating Workshops which address the current situation of the Arab World as a means to inform young people on the obstacles that face us; youth should be given ample time to pose their ideas and experiences.

2-Creating Leadership Training Programs through a Pan-Arab Project that empowers young people's leadership skills, in full cooperation with the educational sector, governments and civil society.

- **Integrating Young People in Decision-Making:**

1-Work with governments to re-evaluate their National Youth Policies in cooperation with young people which allows them to present their views on what they see as priority areas that should be addressed.

2-Creating Youth Advisory Panels for Civil Society organizations to engage young people in the various issues of development.

- **Means to Support Youth-Led Initiatives:**

1-Set aside a specific quota in the social fund of the League of Arab States and another in the budget's of governmental agencies to support youth-led initiatives.

2-Create exclusive media programs that focus on the successes and challenges that face Arab Youth.

It is important to note that such recommendations should be implemented in an inter-generational environment based on mutual respect and understanding between adults and youth.

