

Education for Hope A New Model for Arab Child Upbringing



Children Participation in the Arab Countries
«Field Study»
Abstract

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A New Model for Arab Child Upbringing

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Field Study

New Mind .. New Human .. New Society

«Summary»

The Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD) is an Arab regional non-governmental organization working in the field of childhood development. ACCD was founded in 1987 upon the initiative of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, ACCD's President, and a resolution issued by the League of Arab States.

“Education for Hope”

A New Model for Arab Child Upbringing
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The opinions expressed in this study do not necessarily reflect the views of ACCD and the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND).

"The space and effectiveness of the participation permitted to children in our Arab countries are indicative to the available participation in adult's community and a measure to the effectiveness of the principles of democracy and citizenship in our societies. Children of today must be armed with skills of participation and sound knowledge in the context of enlightened citizenship, to be able to practice them in the world of tomorrow, so as to build together our Arab countries on the basis of participation and the culture of dialogue, tolerance and acceptance of others, thus enhancing the renaissance and progress of our Arab nation".*

Talal Bin Abdul Aziz

*Extracted from the Speech of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, the President of ACCD & AGFUND, in the opening session of the 4th Arab Civil Society Forum for Children held in Beirut, July 2012.

Partners

Arab Council for Childhood & Development (ACCD)

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المجلس العربي للطفولة والتنمية

Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND)

AGFUND is a regional organization that was established in 1980 upon the initiative of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, AGFUND's President, with the support of leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries. AGFUND works mainly in the field of development and growth at the international level through an effective partnership with the United Nations Organization, with regional and national development organizations, with public institutions, with the private sector, as well as with organizations of the civil society.

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Introduction

The Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD), under the auspices of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, the President of ACCD, is exerting scientific efforts to advocate for the issue of childhood development, as well as to activate and ensure child rights and seeking to fill the existing knowledge gaps in the fields of these rights. In the context of its efforts and funded by the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), ACCD has issued this study with a view to focus on one of the basic rights of children; the right to participation and to what extent the Arab children's practices are fulfilling their participation, along with identifying the opportunities and challenges inherent in the Arab culture.

This study stems from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) that was signed and ratified by all Arab countries. This Convention is based on four core principles including the right to participation, which confirms children's right to access information that enable them to form their own views in all matters affecting them. This approach is a strong strategy for developing children's abilities and enabling them positively for their future.

If we are seeking to promote progress and development in our Arab countries, then we all shall be required to promote the culture of Arab children's participation, advocate their legitimate rights in a decent life and build a democratic society that is based on enlightened citizenship that relies on the freedom of expression and religion and the effective participation in public and private lives with no discrimination among citizens according to gender, religion, race or colour.

Studying Arab children's participation in the decision making of matters related to their lives relies on the strong idea that participation means protection. The basic protection of children's rights can be achieved through granting our children a further space to participate in the decisions affecting

their lives and their surrounding world, which requires developing their abilities of participation and the positive daily dealings. So, can we expand the opportunities of development and growth for our children in a manner that enables them to positively participate in a context of enlightened citizenship, with a view to achieve national and social inclusion with all its dimensions for all children for a democratic homeland that ensures enlightened citizenship?

Based on the above-mentioned, ACCD has conducted this study in collaboration with a distinguished teamwork of Arab researchers in eight Arab countries: Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iraq, Qatar and Lebanon, through a central team with a distinguished academic background, headed by Dr. Ahmed Zayed, professor of sociology, as the main researcher in this study.

From the outset, this study has aimed to answer the following questions: What is the status of childhood in our Arab countries? To what extent the Arab countries have developed legislative contexts for children protection? Are there positive approaches towards participation (for children, parents and family members)? What are the dimensions and levels of participation with its different fields? To what extent the main upbringing institutions (family and school) are playing roles in activating children to participation? Are there roles for civil society and media in this regard? What are the obstacles imposed by the cultural and social contexts, and how to overcome them in the future?

The study has depended on data and multiplied tools to answer the above-mentioned questions, which included data on the demographic status of children in the Arab countries, in addition to data on the legislative and institutional status of childhood, along with field data collected through various scientific methods.

Research efforts exerted by the study's teamwork have provided a rich database, information, and theoretical concepts that enabled the authors to draft a final report in light of the concept of participation; "granting children the opportunity to express their opinions or to take actions, whether in conjunction with adults or on their own as individuals or groups". This study

identifies participation's procedural determinants at the levels of the individual, family, community and the public communication domain, and in light of the various levels of participation, which graduate from mere knowledge to actual practices where children assume the responsibility of performing certain actions.

The main results of this study indicate that Arab children are still deprived of their right to participation and that there is a huge gap between the knowledge of participation, the trends towards it and the actual practices of participation in the real lives of children. Arab children are still living in the context of parental family and the domination of adults who formulate children's world and determine the limits of their participation. Moreover, the Arab school is not a truly enabling environment for children practicing their rights of participation in a manner that enables them to express themselves, their world, and their community, as well as to their right to developing their abilities to critical thinking and knowledge building. Further, the results of the study highlight that civil society and media are not, in their turn, enabling educational environments for children's abilities to participation in life with all its aspects. Also, the Arab culture plays an influential role in creating radical differences, emphasizing the continuity of gender discrimination.

Stemming from the results of this study and ACCD's efforts in the field of promoting children participation, we seek to adopt and advocate for a new model of child upbringing, which emphasizes that the Arab child is able to make his/her own life and live it fully, where all forms of physical, mental, emotional and psychological growth are achieved. This new model, which we seek to develop, is based on new perceptions and principles that do not depend on indoctrination and children's suppression, but rather on free active learning, effective and serious participation of children, flexibility and encouraging initiatives, as well as free interaction, raising children awareness and developing their abilities of criticism and creativeness. This is in addition to learning through participation, accepting the right of difference, and the recognition of pluralism and diversity, through a relationship based on non-

discrimination among children. Moreover, the model, which we seek to achieve, relies on integrated rights-based approach for children, and the belief that the best interests of children are superior to all other interests, in addition to the right of mutual affection between parents and children, so that parents' impact would undertake a positive role in the process of upbringing.

We are looking forward to providing a new model of social upbringing that would be considered an approach of our commitment to instill the culture of participation that grows with our children as a well-established culture of values and behaviors that promote building the targeted democratic society. Such society is based on citizenship, participation, acceptance of others, tolerance, the ability to express and practice critical dialogue, handling differences, and creating a status of social harmony. In addition, the new model of upbringing that we seek to initiate confirms that "participation means protection and development". Hence, participation becomes an educational effort which has its mechanisms, rules, and methods that are based on practicing in all aspects of child's life in family, school, media and public life.

ACCD calls upon all partners and stakeholders to cooperate and work together for the development of Arab children, so as to ensure their abilities to participate in a new world where children's potential capacities are released towards contributing in building a new Arab society of knowledge, comprehensive development and citizenship.

The Arab children are the hope and the future for our Arab countries, and their right to participation is their right to protection as well as their right to development in all fields, not to mention their right to enjoy humanitarian upbringing that promotes democracy and enlightened citizenship.

Prof. Dr. Hassan Al Bilawi

Secretary General of ACCD

Acknowledgement

ACCD expresses its gratitude and appreciation to the continuous support of AGFUND and extends its appreciation to Professor Dr. Ahmed Zayed, the main researcher of this study, and the team of Arab researchers who closely cooperated to develop this distinguished study that is considered to be an added value to the Arab literature in the field of Arab child rights.

ACCD is also grateful to parents and the workers in media outlets, educational institutions and civil society organizations who cooperated with the research team of this study, with a view to promote children's right to participation. Moreover, thankfulness is extended to ACCD's team work that provided all technical and logistic facilities to accomplish this study.

Deep thankfulness, appreciation and love are for our dear children in all Arab countries who participated in this study and expressed their views and dreams on the issues and topics affecting their lives in a clear, frank and transparent manner. They put in our hands the reasons behind the existing gap between knowledge of the right to participation and its actual practice. We hope that such right would be realized as an effective and positive participation that contributes in achieving enlightened citizenship, which is the basis of the peoples' progress.

Team Members

Scientific Supervision:

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Executive Summary

Children participation, in many cases, is nothing more than an attempt to involve children in some events, and it has not been framed to become an approach based on children participation in decision-making and enabling them to ensure that their rights are enforced. Therefore, it is rare to see children actively participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects and programs targeting them. Protecting children is considered to be a subject for the adults interested in securing children; being in dire need of protection and not as being active doers in society. Stereotyping of children, as the weakest groups of society, has contributed in promoting this trend as well as presenting the children as victims of the surrounding circumstances and not as entitled to such rights. On the other hand, practical experiments show that most of the programs directed to solve the problems of children in the Arab world are planned without even involving them or taking their point of views. They are not being consulted in the process of identifying needs, and even at program evaluation. Thus, children are deprived of their right to participation and expressing their opinions regarding the programs that target them.

Stemming from efforts exerted to promote child rights, including the right to participation and work to bridge the existing knowledge gaps in the areas of Arab child rights, ACCD initiated – funded by AGFUND – conducting a study entitled “Children Participation in the Arab Countries” in eight Arab countries (Jordan - Tunisia - Saudi Arabia - Sudan - Iraq - Qatar - Lebanon - Egypt). The study tackles the practices of Arab children for their right to participation and identifies the opportunities and challenges inherent in the Arab culture.

Justifications of the Study:

The right to participation is one of the four core principles of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is indicated in children's access to information that enables them to form their own views and to express them freely, in addition to listening to children in all matters relating to them, including judicial and administrative procedures; given the fact that children are active citizens in society and have their rights and duties. Children participation contributes to developing themselves, gives them trust, and supports making decisions in their favor, especially if based on their needs, interests, and the opinions resulting from their direct experiences. Further, children's expression of their views is a powerful tool to address violence, abuse, discrimination, and all forms and kinds of abuse and exploitation. However, ensuring the right to participation faces complexities, traditional approaches and cultures that formulate a challenge for the state of children in most societies of the world.

Objectives of the Study:

- Shedding light on the demographic status of childhood and children in the Arab countries in general and the countries under study in particular.
- Shedding light on the legislative and social status of children participation in the Arab world.
- Identifying the amount of parents' and children's knowledge of the different dimensions of participation, including knowledge with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, in addition to how the adults and children consider participation and responsibility limits of parents and children.
- Identifying the approaches of parents, children, civil society organizations and institutions concerned with childhood regarding the issue of children participation.
- Recognizing the reality of children participation in the Arab family by revealing parents positive attitudes towards the ideal image for dialogue and partnership, and its desired benefits within the family, as well as the extent of its reflection in reality, so that children would feel their existence.
- Identifying the manifestations of participation or its indicators within the

- family, as told by the parents and children.
- Identifying the nature of school environment, and its role in activating or obstructing children participation.
 - Discovering the role of the school in protecting children rights to participation, permitted levels of participation, the vision of children and parents regarding the role of school in activating the participation of children and protecting their rights.
 - Identifying the role of different media types "written and audio/visual" in activating the children right to participation.
 - Recognizing the role and contribution of active national and international institutions and organizations, in the field of child rights in the Arab countries under study, in activating children participation.
 - Identifying the relationship of children participation with their ability to know their rights and protect themselves from risk, violence and exploitation.
 - Identifying the most important obstacles that prevent activating children's right to participation.
 - Identifying the conditions and incentives to activate the participation of children in their communities.

The Concept of Children Participation

The study reviews several definitions of the concept of participation; the meanings of participation vary according to those in charge of defining the concept and the different contexts in which the subject is addressed. The analysis of the study is based on considering children participation as an opportunity for them to express their views and have impact on the issues that affect their lives through announcing their views or taking actions whether in conjunction with the adults or on their own or in groups.

According to this study, participation includes granting children the greatest opportunity to express their opinions, contributing in decision-making and assuming responsibilities without discrimination, as well as respecting their right to think of everything that belongs to them and form an opinion thereof. This is in addition to their participation in making the decisions that affect them, directly or indirectly, and enabling them, through trusting and enhancing their potential, to develop their abilities to command and control their situation. Thus, the definition of children participation in this study goes beyond the passive participation to include a set of gradual levels that start from knowledge, positive trends and expression of opinion to engage in social and political issues and activities as a whole.

This study - given in eight chapters – tackles the areas of participation and procedural indicators. Areas in this study are the fields of participation, which are centered on the child being the subject of participation and its first doer. These fields range from the family, the school, the local community, the civil society organizations and then the public communication sphere.

Results of the Study:

Results of the study confirm that the Arab children are still deprived of their right to participation, and the study concluded with several results, the most important of which can be summarized as follows:

- There is a gap between knowledge of participation, the trends towards it and the actual practices of participation.
- Participation is still practiced within the context of the parental family and male domination, taking into account that education contributes - albeit rather slightly - to change this situation.
- Children still live in the world of adults, which is to them the world that formulates their lives and actions. It is, therefore, a mysterious and sometimes frightening world in children's views.
- The level of participation decreases with the increase from mere knowledge and trends to encouraging self-expression, to expressing opinions, to adopting such opinions and then the practice that reveals shouldering the responsibility.
- The level of participation decreases whenever we went out of family circle to school circle and then to civil society circle and in all areas, there is a guardian eye and rigid frames.
- The Arab family is still the first place where the child can exercise a positive and effective participation.
- The Arab school is not an enabling environment to participation; it does not provide favorable conditions. Even when encouraging participation, the school does not reflect it in actual practices.
- Civil society and the media do not play a significant role in supporting or activating participation.

The full Arabic version of the study "Children Participation in the Arab Countries" can be downloaded from ACCD portal: www.arabccd.org