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Towards a Fair Start for Children in the Arab World

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Breaking Down The Barriers: Integrated Programming in ECD

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Community Involvement in Early Childhood Development:

This article summarises a paper prepared by Julia Gilkes, addressing all constituents of the local community, involved in meeting children's needs and rights. It presents a tool for probing the reality and the potential that enable local communities to take part in the decisions that affect children.

Early Childhood is the most fascinating period of childhood, where a dependent and tiny baby is transformed into the curious, creative and imaginative child. This period of life is usually considered to begin at conception and go through the preschool years and into the first grades of primary schooling, up to eight years. Thus the critical stages of development begin in the home setting, or in alternatives for the less fortunate children. They are followed by the exploration of the world about them, as children move into the local community, and into the first years of schooling.

Who are the people in the community living and working with young children?

In the early years, parents and other family members are the primary carers and educators of their children. Across the Arab World, changes in societies are making an impact on the traditional family. Children increasingly live in female headed households, have mothers working in paid employment outside the home, are involved in child labour themselves, are homeless or live in families that survive away from the support of the extended family. Key carers for children are often other children, who are sometimes preschoolers themselves or siblings in primary school. There are children who do not benefit from family life, but live in institutions, e.g. orphanages. Their primary carers are a range of qualified and unqualified staff. However, there are communities, which are close knit, with a range of leadership (traditional leaders, neighbourhood committees, and NGOs) that support the families and their children at the local level.

In many situations, where children live in poverty, are marginalised, suffer from armed conflict, NGOs are the main provider of resources and services for early childhood development (ECD). However, services are designed and implemented without much involvement of the community, and even less involvement of the children themselves, as policy makers struggle with the usual balancing of budget and political survival issues.

Yet, the media, writers, illustrators, dramatists, designers, publishers, etc. are important in the

debate on ECD. These can build on and strengthen existing knowledge and practice. They offer opportunities for children and the community to participate in presenting and exchanging their ideas, experiences and challenges, and opportunities to enrich the inner self.

What involvement does the community already have in early childhood development?

Looking forward to the birth of a new child can support or exert pressure on a young mother. The importance of producing a boy establishes the first step in discrimination in childhood. Gender issues, disability, even colour of a child's skin can offer celebration or disappointment or even rejection. Children are drawn into a community, learning many messages which establishes cultural values and expectations. Expressive arts, religious and political practices are absorbed and present the young children with their identity in their community, with the dreams and visions of the society. These are often very positive and nurturing, but also instilling levels of racism, sexism and other discriminating practice.

Nurturing environments for young children are established in the home and extended in the neighbourhood, with places for safe play, access to good services that ensure the child's survival and development, the clinic, the library, the playground, safe streets and so on.

Why is it important to strengthen community involvement?

To celebrate and build on the cultural traditions that foster successful ECD and to challenge those traditions that limit or even damage young children in their early years, require motivating and enabling members of the community to see the realities for children.

Strengthening the existing involvement and drawing in new contributions begin with people's potential and proceed towards their enhancement and growth. By increasing their communication skills, their ability to trust and respect people and their critical and analytical thinking, there will be more opportunities for differing members and organisations within communities to begin to work together on behalf of young children.

From the community development perspective, involvement in the early years offers many creative possibilities. It can often be the catalyst for strengthening other aspects of community life. ECD is often the entry point for recognising the changing roles of women. Working mothers require childcare support when the traditional extended family and neighbourhood support networks have changed or disappeared.

Introducing the potential for children and young people to participate in community development, would help adults in the home, community and institutions to understand children's points of view and increase their visibility.

The involvement of the community with children will raise questions of accessibility to resources and services to the targeted children and communities and their effectiveness in meeting children's needs.

The obstacles and Challenges to Community Involvement in ECD are reflected in the three following issues:

Children and childhood in the cultural traditions:

Arab culture is very dynamic. The heritage is being adjusted continuously in view of the experience of the community, the broadening and deepening of contemporary knowledge and a changing society. With different contributions from the community, adults need to examine whether they provide nurturing and supportive environments for the children. Cultural traditions that underpin child rearing practices can be examined and challenges to achieving Children's rights and needs identified.

Understanding how children learn and grow

Childhood is a part of life, not a preparation for life. Children are a great source of pride in Arab culture and societies. Nevertheless, many perceptions and attitudes to early childhood do not reflect this. At the regional workshops convened by the Arab Resource Collective in 1994 and 1995, a number of principles were adopted to underpin early childhood development. They were categorised under three major headings: child and childhood, the environment of early childhood and programmes for early childhood.

In addition, the following **obstacles**, for communities to understand how children develop, were identified:

- There is a lack of knowledge about children's development.
- Attention is given primarily to health and physical care, from birth to three.
- Play and child initiated activities are not valued.
- Children do not have quality time with parents.
- There is often a lack of consistency in dealing with a child.
- There is a lack of a rich linguistic environment to foster children's mother tongue, Arabic.
- Adults often project what a child cannot do, not what he/ she can do.
- ECD professionals are often reluctant to involve parents in their programmes
- Responsibilities for services for

children are organised within different departments, with little coordination or consultations with families.

The challenges to community understanding of how children grow are:

- That children learn holistically and experientially, through play, exploration, communication and interaction with peers and adults.
- That adults must evaluate the kinds of hidden messages that are incorporated in the children's environments to ensure a nurturing and supportive approach for all children.
- That adults evaluate the reality of experiences in the home, community and early childhood institutions by focussing on accessibility, usefulness and relevance to young children, from a children's right perspective.

Enabling adults to work together for a more holistic and integrated approach to ECD:

The holistic, integrated approach is based on three axes:

- Children themselves, and how they develop holistically and continuously.
- People who live and work with and for them.
- The programmes provided to ensure healthy holistic child development. There is a wealth of experience in the community. Yet many programmes do not value the participation or partnership in planning and management, but offer services often in isolation, which target aspects of child development, not integrated approaches. Many members of the community require support to increase their confidence, to take their place successfully in partnership with the 'natural' decision makers in their communities.

The **Challenges** therefore indicate the need:

- To work with the community and not for it, which implies that people be aware of their right to contribute to the decision making process.
- To set up systems to share information, skills and resources for the benefit of all children.
- To explore strategies appropriate to the cultural settings for supporting and developing low cost services.
- To recognise children as a resource for community development.
- To understand children's rights within the cultural contexts.
- To become organised for action, with advocacy strategies.
- To establish links with other groups, through networking, newsletters, etc.

A **Point of View:** Rima Za'za', Peace Garden, Sidon, Lebanon, commenting on the article above:

I would like to comment on the development of relationships between workers in Early Childhood institutions and parents who constitute the widest sector of the local community. I would like to suggest some of the ways through which both parties could work together, with the child, at home and the institutions. These are:

1. Address the right of parents to knowledge and information, especially when they have a child with special needs. It is noteworthy that in this respect the workers need information about the child's life within the family, which can only be collected from family members. This is partially achieved in the kindergartens, but is discontinued in the first years of the elementary cycle.

2. Nurture respect of the parents' needs and introduce methods of working with parents in the workers' "in-service" training programmes, in addition to the skills and attitudes that enrich the workers' field practice.

3. Allow parents to participate, next to the workers, in the training programmes. Parents' personal experience could contribute to the development the training programme, so that it responds to the reality and needs of the children, families, and care givers. This happens in rare occasions and as a result of individual initiatives.

4. Base the educational events targeting parents on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This aims at inducing positive changes into the parents' beliefs, attitudes and practice concerning their children.

5. Provide parents with new sources of knowledge, by encouraging them to attend educational events resourced by specialists, and to participate in committees and organisations representing service receivers.

6. Document examples of good practice in cooperation and partnership involving parents and institutions, so as to use them during discussions and exchange of experiences. The use of real life examples is motivating in the implementation of partnership.

Partnership between parents and workers is still facing many obstacles, though there is no doubt about its benefits to the children. Both parties have to exert joint efforts to share knowledge and skills.

Parents Participation: A Field Experience:

British Save the Children Fund (SCF) started a health programme for the Palestinian Community in Lebanon in 1950, in collaboration with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). In 1984, SCF launched the Early Childhood Programme, that is now running 6 Kindergartens, mostly in South Lebanon, complementing UNRWA's education services that start at six years of age. The programme serves about 500 special hardship children, i.e. those who belong to large families with limited income, those with a sick, unemployed or detained head of family, and those with divorced parents. A home visit by KG workers is at the basis of the provision.

Goals and Approaches:

Work in KGs and other centers run by SCF is based on the holistic approach, with the following goals:

- To assist children's physical, psychological, social and intellectual development.
- To secure safe play spaces for children.
- To link the local community with public child's care.
- To prepare children for the UNRWA schooling system.

In the Kindergartens, children are subject to a child-centered educational programme, including activities such as play, art, story telling, pre-reading, pre-math and all forms of observation that support the child's development process.

Efforts are made towards working with the child's family and the local community. The KG work strives to involve the community through a development programme, which includes:

*Involving local institutions in working with mothers, especially in the health field, to raise awareness concerning child's care and protection. There is an annual programme in this field, in which a number of local institutions and UNRWA participate.

*Inviting parents to educational meetings inside the centres, to address the child's emotional, social, physical and mental development. These meetings contribute to raising their awareness about the child's needs in this stage of life.

*Organising workshops for mothers and sisters of children on the importance of play and on making educational puppets and toys to use with older children.

*Home visiting by KG workers.

*Supporting the transition from the KG to the

UNRWA schools through joint working days involving teachers from both the elementary school and the KGs run by different local organisations.

The journey:

Parents participate in activities of SCF's KGs and centers. By the end of the day, parents write down their comments about their role and their work in a notebook kept in each of the centers. In addition, parents' committees assist in the planning and implementation of activities, participate in the home visits for special cases, and support the workers in many areas.

There are also efforts to include children with special needs in the programme. However, to date, most of the children included in the KGs and clubs are only those with mild disabilities.

Preschool Education: Problems and Perspectives

A symposium was organised by ATFAL and hosted by Mohammad V University, Department of Education Sciences, in Rabat, Morocco, on 26-28 November 1997. The symposium highlighted essential issues in pre school education such as the reality of pre school education, parents' participation, basic and continuous training, health and education, as well as specialised topics, like the inclusion of children with disabilities and the Child to Child approach.

The proceedings:

The symposium started with an official opening under the patronage of the Minister of Education and other officials.

The morning sessions focused on one main theme for each day. In the afternoon, there were round tables on the main theme, as well as working groups on different topics that were not necessarily interrelated.

The symposium brought together a large number of early childhood workers and advocates from Arab and western countries, to exchange information about their work. The presentation of life experiences from Arab countries, representing a variety of settings and potentials, was one of its most important features.

However, the unavailability of French-Arabic interpretation during the lectures and workshops limited the complete understanding of the topics and affected the level of discussion. Also, apart from the lunch break, little time was spared by the heavy programme for people to get acquainted.

A fringe meeting:

A small team representing ARC partners participated in the symposium. Team members were Dr. Nagib Khuzam (Egypt), Rima Za'za' (Lebanon), and Dr. Hala Hazzan (Palestine). They established contacts with participants from Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya during a fringe meeting convened by Dr. Khaled al Andalusi of ATFAL. The main purpose was to explore ways of networking and liaising with ARC (Minutes of the meeting are available).

While presenting her professional experience on the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Kindergarten, Rima Za'za' introduced ARC's goals and some of its resources and newsletters. These resources generated a wide interest among academics, students, field workers, etc.

ARC's work and concerns, as well as the topics of the symposium, were also introduced in a radio interview conducted by Tanja Radio Station with Dr. Khaled al Andalusi, Dr. Hala Hazzan, Rima Za'za' and Dr. Mohammad Fa'ek (from Mohammad V University).

Follow up:

Two recommendations were made for follow up:

- ARC's resources and publications attracted much interest: work should be done to promote and distribute them in all Arab countries.
- Networking and communications should be activated in order to broaden the circles of outreach within the Arab countries in the Maghreb.

ATFAL organisation:

An interview with Dr. Khaled al Andalusi, Director of ATFAL, and Professor at the Department of Education Sciences at Mohammad V university, Rabat.

By Samia Issa

ATFAL is an Arab institution working in the field of childhood: How was it established? What are its goals? What were the stages of its development? Dr. Khaled al Andalusi answered these questions by highlighting the ideas and activities of the organisation, based on its practical experience.

The first stage: "brainstorming" (1984-1986). It brought together all people concerned with children's affairs, academics and practitioners.

The second stage: "partnership" (1986-1989). This stage witnessed the first three-year cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. It was followed by an agreement with the Wakf Ministry, which runs religious estates and Islamic affairs, and supervises the *Kuttabs* (Koranic

teaching institutions which provide the first years of schooling). The *Kuttabs* are widespread in Morocco. In the late eighties, they covered 98% of the preschool work.

The third stage (1990-1994), produced a manual on preschool education, "the first in our history. We tried to build it on the needs of the caregivers and children and not on a preset academic vision".

The fourth stage (1991-1994) started when the Ministry of Education adopted the ideas of ATFAL. The difficulties of working with the Ministry of Education were overcome, to achieve the following;

1. At the level of the child: due consideration started to be given to the child's needs and potentials in the preschool years.
2. At the level of the caregiver: the competence of the caregiver was raised, following her awareness of her educational needs.
3. At the level of the educational system: new ideas were widely accepted by the staff of the Ministry of Education.
4. At the institutional level: a new department concerned with preschool education was established.
5. At the training level: a new division for the training of professionals in preschool education was established.

The fifth stage: "diffusion of ideas" (1994 onwards): A wider interest in this field has been created. The Ministry of Education adopted the new ideas proposed by ATFAL and its partners within the ministries. Recent knowledge and trends were adopted and we are in the process of spreading them in all areas in Morocco, both in cities and villages.

Breaking down the Barriers, Creating Integrated ECD Programmes

The following is a summary of the keynote address of Judith Evans, Director of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, to ARC's workshop on the Holistic and Integrative Approach in Early Childhood Education and Development (Cyprus, 15-18/2/1997). Summarised by Najwa Munla.

The holistic Development of the Child:

The holistic approach considers the child as a whole being, whose development can be supported or hindered, in the framework of the family, the local community and the nation. The economic, social, political and cultural dimensions have their impact on the child's development. Hence, they ought to be addressed if we are to assure integrated

programming for children and their families.

1. The Barriers:

The realities we face when trying to address children's needs often create barriers that lead to compartmentalising children's own growth and development. Examples of these barriers:

- The division of services along sectoral lines, which has often created competition and one-sided programming, with diverse goals.
- The great proliferation of academic knowledge which creates sharper --and more limited-- lenses through which we view children.
- The allocation of funds through ministries often guides programming, when in fact it should be the programmatic needs of children that guide funding.
- The scarcity of resources leads to limited service provision.
- The lack of information about services provided by others.
- The import of the ECD programming models, without analysing their compatibility with the local culture, etc.

2. Benefits of EC Programmes:

Research has demonstrated that the following benefits would support the reasoning towards investing resources in EC.

- Increased economic productivity, that can go up to a return of \$ 7.16 for every invested dollar, as demonstrated by one of the good ECD programmes.
- Savings to society, demonstrated by the indication that EC programmes lead to the reduction of the drop-out rates (and consequent need for remedial programmes), and to the reduction in social (including gender) and economic inequalities.
- The provision of an appropriate response to the changing social and demographic environment.

3. Principles for the Development of Integrated Programming:

There is no one model that provides services for all children, or even for a group of children. Strategies differ from one context to the other in their requirements of time, energy and cooperation. Child development programmes ought to be multi-dimensional and integrative. Hence, the need to develop inclusive programmes at both local and national levels.

Malaysia provides the example of a government that has established a working group of 6 ministries, three of which run KGs and preschool programmes. The working group succeeded at assessing the children and families' needs, and matching them with located available resources.

4. Strategies for the Development of Integrative Services:

- Involving parents and the local community in the needs' assessment, and the development of a conceptual framework, considering the child as a whole.
- Evaluating the actual situation, to determine the programme's elements.
- Selecting credible leaders from the local community.
- Identifying the most convenient location to launch the programme.
- Investing enough time and resources in planning, testing and implementing.
- Defining clear objectives, without counting only on volunteers and unskilled workers, to reduce costs.
- Keeping the sense for cultural and social ties, to ensure coherence.
- Planning for organisational capacity building, and for developing and institutionalising the programme, based on feedback and continuous evaluation.

When building an integrative child-centered approach, the most difficult and dangerous challenge to face is the changing of attitudes (the bias to specialists, for example). For instance, the adoption of a holistic/integrative approach to child development does not necessarily mean the provision of direct center-based services. Efforts should rather be made to enhance the family's financial conditions, and to enrich the child's environment by supporting the institutions that work with families, as a useful strategy for the development of quality programmes.

Workshop Notes: The Workshop on the Holistic Integrative Approach, that was held in Larnaca-Cyprus in February 1997 was attended by 20 participants from NGOs in Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco, in addition to staff members of the regional UNICEF office in Amman and of the International Consultative Group (Judith Evans and Ellen Ilfeld), as well as other resource persons.

In addition to Judith Evans keynote address summarised above, there were presentations of local experiences of work with a holistic/integrative approach, as well as a presentation/discussion of the electronic means of communication.

The participants worked collectively on the holistic/integrative concept, and revisited the ECD principles adapted and "arabised" during a regional workshop in 1995. A new principle related to children living in difficult circumstances was added, suggesting processes for working with them.

Field experiences were exchanged. Follow up work was planned on publications, a data base, and the electronic mail. **(A full report of the workshop is available).** Another useful reference is the report of "Dialogue 95", a regional workshop on the "Concepts and Principles" of ECED. Both reports are available from ARC, in Arabic and English.)

The Consultative Group (CG) in Early Childhood Care and Development

(Note that the following is a translation of an Arabic text, which was itself drawn from an English source!).

The Consultative Group is an international mechanism set up to promote the importance of the holistic/integrative work and investment in ECCD. It also operates as a coordinating set up for various regional networks. Participating organisations constitute a wide network of partners and projects, who are offered opportunities to exchange information on, and learn from pioneering experiences in different parts of the world

The Goals:

The CG works towards:

- *Widening of the knowledge basis in ECCD
- *Playing a "facilitating" role
- *Building bridges
- *Playing a "consultative" role, particularly to major funding agencies, by accumulating the field experiences that support holistic/ integrative planning, programming and policy making.

The Activities:

The CG secretariat coordinates an information exchange process through:

- *Newsletters.
- *The internet (visit <http://www.ecdgroup.com>, a website rich in basic material and examples and has information about other interesting sites).
- *Working meetings.

Achievements:

- The work of the Consultative Group over the years has contributed to raising the level of general understanding of early childhood realities and needs.
- Materials produced by the CG are widely used in designing policies and practice by specialised institutions and organisations.
- Research projects have demonstrated the financial, educational, physical and social benefits of ECD programmes.
- The adoption of ECD into general development programmes has led to an increase of investment in ECD itself.

- The work of the CG has contributed to many governments, ministries of education and regional organisations adopting appropriate ECD policies, in support for small children and their families.
- The CG has directly contributed to the development of programmes and support strategies for small children and their families, in various conditions, through the provision of expertise and scientific knowledge.
- Cooperation and partnerships have increased between funding agencies, NGOs and governments .

Participants in the Consultative Group since 1984:

Foundations: Aga Khan Foundation, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and International Youth Foundation.

Bilateral Organisations: Inter-American Development Bank, International Development Research Centre, Organisation of American States, SIDA, USAID and the World Bank.

UN Agencies: International Child Development Centre, UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO

International NGOs: Christian Children’s Fund, Save the Children/USA and World Vision

Other Organisations: Academy for Education Development, Education Development Centre, & High/Scope Education Research Foundation.

The CG secretariat has also a number of regional members. Since 1997, a **delegate of the Arab Resource Collective (ARC)** started attending the meetings of the CG in this capacity.

For extra information and to order resources and the newsletter:

Kathy Bartlett, Director,
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URL: <http://www.ecdgroup.com>

The Coordinators’ Notebook (CN), is a newsletter published by the Consultative Group and can be ordered free. The CN covers major ECD issues, including Health, Education, Practice in Child rearing, Men in Children’s life, Awareness Raising, Policies in Early Childhood, etc.

Effects of Lending schemes on Childcare:

The outcome of a statistical survey carried out by Khaled al Nabrees.

The saving-linked credit scheme is considered one of the main initiatives run and supported by Save the Children/USA in the West Bank and Gaza. The programme aims to improve the social and economic conditions of the poor. It provides small loans to needy women, to secure an increase in their income, as well as in their self esteem, and to improve the living conditions of their children. The programme is based on the principle of revolving small loans for women with limited income.

The management of the programme conducted a field survey aiming at:

- Collecting essential data about a number of social and economic aspects that relate to the group of loan-receivers, and their families and children.
- Better understanding the processes and suggesting ways for improvement.

The field survey lasted from May to June 1997, and led to the collection of rich, qualitative information, and opened the way for collective analysis of the data by the research team and the workers of the programme. The survey was carried with a representative sample of loan-receivers (411), through a questionnaire of 59 questions. Open discussions were conducted with 20 loan-receivers, and their husbands and children. A series of working sessions were organised with field workers.

Main Results:

- The average family size of the loan-receivers is very close to the national average.
- More than half of them (56.7%) owned or rented their houses.
- A large percentage of the loan-receivers’ family members are in the active working force, with a higher rate than the national average.
- Most loan-receivers are married women. Their average age is 34. Most of them have completed at least 10 years of schooling (62.8%). A small percentage completed 13 years or more (7.5%). These averages are very close to the national ones.
- The vast majority of them are both in and out workers.
- Approximately half of the loan-receivers pointed out that family decisions are made jointly by the wife and husband. The

research has indicated congruence between the educational level of the loan-receivers and the level of participation in family decisions.

- Research showed that the average number of children was four, a little lower than the national average.
- More than half the loan-receivers (54.7%) believe that education provides their sons with extra respect in the community, while 55% of them believe that education ensures extra knowledge for the daughters to raise up their children.
- The loan-receivers noted that the eldest sister was the first responsible for the care of her smaller brothers and sisters, while they were busy with their work.
- Most loan-receivers (84.1%) expressed interest in childcare facilities to be secured by the local community as a whole. General discussions of this issue highlighted their interest in receiving training in techniques of childcare.

Main Conclusions & Recommendations:

The results of this survey highlighted the challenges facing the loan-receivers in balancing their work with their children's care and other household duties. The survey, also, showed their interest in the social benefits of the programme, as much as in its economic benefits.

In addition to recommendations concerning the upgrading of their vocational and production skills, the following points were raised:

- The need for alternative interventions concerning childcare.
- The development of indicators that can be used to monitor and evaluate the future impact of the programme.
- Support for informal educational programmes.
- Encouraging women in the local community to look after the loan-receivers' children during their absence at work.
- Implementing some of these activities through coordination with all organisations working in the local community.

Educating Young Children: A Broader Vision of "Education for All"

The international conference on 'Education for All' convened in Jomtien in 1990 was an attempt to improve the conditions of education in developing countries. The main message of the conference was that developing countries and international

organisations ought to face the problems of illiteracy and regress in the level of education, and concentrate efforts and investment in basic education.

According to the document adopted by the conference, "A Framework for Meeting Basic Education Needs", national basic education is committed to work on 4 axes.

- The elementary stage (of four years) for all children, where they learn the basic principles of reading, writing, arithmetic and general skills for life in the framework of family and local community.
- The informal education for children and adults, especially women, who did not attend schooling.
- The widening and improvement of the services in development, care, and education of early childhood.
- Extra general knowledge education in basic living skills, targeting all the population, through the use of the mass media (radio and TV).

This initiative is characterised by the broadening of the definition of 'basic education', and its adaptation to the reality of the people it targets. Although this initiative calls for increased investment in elementary education, it does not stop at this. For instance, it provides a wider vision of education in the national arena. It addresses various social sectors through informal channels, when the need arises, such as the Early Childhood stage.

The initiative does not conclude with the demand to donor countries and organisations to invest extra resources in education. It rather urges them to reconsider the priorities in a creative way, when planning various aspects of basic education. This implies that the traditional education system is not convenient, in itself, to meet all the educational needs and to prepare people in developing countries to handle their social problems.

Despite the real success in the provision of education for increasing numbers of children and adults, the level of education was alarming on the international scene in the late eighties. Despite the progress achieved between the sixties and early eighties, 4/5th of children in the developing world were going through their early years with a clear decrease in learning opportunities, due to poverty. 100 million children were deprived of elementary education, with a general drop out rate of 50%, and a higher rate among girls. This intense problem in South East Asia and the Middle East, might lead to dangerous educational and social consequences for the future generations of children.

Though the picture in the developed countries is much better, it is still far from being ideal. The numbers of literate children have increased. Children have access to better learning, better health, and a higher standard of living, at levels never seen before in human history. Nevertheless, there is an increasing dissatisfaction about the quality of education, resulting in an increasing number of youth who can barely read and write, a higher rate of youth unemployment, and an accelerating rate of crime among youth in the poor neighbourhoods of big cities.

"Education For All": Is it an Effective Way?

It is to be noted that the World Bank and the UNDP more than doubled their funds for basic education programmes in recent years. In turn, UNICEF have increased their human resources in the field of education at national levels, and established a central unit in New York to implement educational activities, including in early childhood development. In addition, UNICEF increased its contribution to the funding of basic education from 46 million dollars to 79 million dollars a year. UNESCO has also raised their funding of basic education to 54 million dollars over two years.

In cooperation with UNICEF, UNESCO have set up a committee for the EFA programme, and launched a number of joint projects, including an ambitious initiative for the 9 most populated countries, among which are the highest illiteracy rates in the world. Both agencies cooperated also in the establishment of a specialised unit concerned with early childhood and family.

National reactions to the 'Jomtien Declaration' were very positive. Over a hundred countries have set specific goals for EFA. More than half of these countries launched mass campaigns around the issue. Much less countries, however, took practical steps to establish national mechanisms for the EFA programme, or to increase the national budget for basic education. It is still early time to complete the basic information about the issue. Many hopes are pinned to the possibility of achieving one of the EFA main goals by the year 2000, that is a minimum of 80% of all countries ratifying the Jomtien Declaration.

A Ministry for Children Education?

The international organisations trying to work in these fields face the difficulty of the lack of a specialised ministry for informal education, including early childhood education. In addition, in the countries that suffer socio-economic problems, education is difficult to develop, promote and

evaluate, especially where the mass media are commercially run. Educational programmes targeting parents and adults have even less funding than children education programmes, while the mobilisation of their potentials at community level is essential for a successful educational entry point to most children.

Early Childhood and Basic Education within the framework of Education For All (EFA):

The basic education steering committee held a meeting at UNESCO at the end of 1997. It was attended by 32 representatives of international and non-governmental organisations, who reviewed the issues related of basic education within the framework of EFA. The major findings of the meeting were the following:

- Demand on early childhood development programmes was increasing in many countries, but there was a decrease in good quality programmes.

- In most cases, funding agencies initiated the activities in response to needs.

- Governments have yet to introduce early childhood education as a high priority, and to adopt a more active role to secure higher quality and a minimal coherence. Funding agencies ought to take a stronger role in helping governments to develop policies for early childhood.

- Despite the fact that early childhood development is part of the 'holistic vision' of basic education adopted in the Jomtien conference, it is not being well negotiated. Some funding parties are ambiguous in their support for early childhood education programmes. Therefore, the advocates of early childhood development ought to work on a clearer definition of the following:

1. The stakeholders in early childhood development.
2. The costs and benefits of ECD.
3. How to measure progress and constraints.
4. How to emphasise leadership while strengthening partnership.
5. Finding a general model of ECD to measure innovation.

The Following Resources were presented in the Arabic Issue:

1. Never Too Young: How Young children can take responsibility and make decisions:

A manual by Judy Miller, published by Save the Children Fund/UK, 1996, 73 pp.

The Mother-Guide: A Programme for Home Guidance on Child Development from birth to two years of age:

Working papers by Rosalind Dueim and the staff of Mother-Guide centres, published by the Trust of Childhood Programmes and Community Work, Jerusalem, 1997, 125 pp. This manual is also available from ARC.

3. Sex Education in Early Childhood:

A five chapter book, prepared by Nabila Espanioli and published by Al Tufula Center, Nazareth, 1997, 147pp.

4. Ideas for the Nutrition of your Child:

This booklet also covers children with disabilities, by Nahla Ghandour, Ghassan Kanafani Cultural Foundation. Published by GKCF and Norwegian People's Aid, 45pp.

5. Helping Children in Difficult Circumstance:

A manual by Naomi Richman, Diana Perera and others, published by Save the Children Fund, UK. Translated and published in Arabic by ARC, 38 pp.

6. Introducing Evaluation: A practical introduction to evaluation in ECD projects:

A manual by Willem van der Eyken, published by Bernard van Leer Foundation and translated by ARC, 56 pp.

7. A framework for Descriptive Reports on the Conditions of Early Childhood in Arab Countries: applying the holistic/integrative approach.

The report of a regional workshop convened by ARC in Cyprus, in July 1997. Arabic

8. The Holistic and Integrative Approach to EC Education and Development:

The report of a regional workshop convened by ARC in Cyprus, in February 1997. Arabic and English (57pp.).

9. Alternatives in 'Elementary Education' for Special Groups in the Middle East and North Africa:

A report prepared by Eric Allemano, published by UNICEF, MENARO, 1996.

10. 'Ma'an' issue N° 1: the newsletter of ARC's Child-to-Child programme. The main theme was **the story of the Child-to-Child Approach**. Annual Subscriptions: \$10 for Arab Countries and \$20 for other countries. Available only in Arabic. English summaries may become available.

11. HAQ-QI N° 5: The newsletter of ARC's Children's Rights programme. The main theme was **Training on Children's Rights**. Annual Subscriptions: \$10 for individuals and non-profit organisations in Arab Countries, \$20 for other organisations and \$40 for other countries. Two issues are available in English, on the **right to non-discrimination** and on **training on children's rights**.

Other relevant newsletters by ARC

- ❖ *Haq-qi* (My Right) on the Rights of the Child
- ❖ *Maa'n* (Together) on the Child to Child Approach.

Evaluation of the first Arabic issue of QATR AN- NADA:

In the winter of 1997, 130 persons responded to an evaluation survey after the first issue, including 31 from Palestine. In addition, a joint report was sent by the staff of the Trust of Childhood Programmes and Community Work in Jerusalem. In Lebanon, 4 responses were received from Save the Children Fund, 25 from the Najdeh Association, and 3 from other organisations.

The contribution of the Trust of Childhood Programmes and Community Work in Jerusalem was remarkable: a number of workshops were organised for over 50 EC workers to encourage them to respond to the questionnaire.

The **subjects** which were indicated as most important for the readers were:

1. Issues: Children's problems, children's participation, problems faced by EC workers, children with special needs.
2. Concepts and principles: Children's rights, women's rights, the holistic approach.
3. Other issues: EC workers experiences, children's works, teaching children the love of nature, encouraging the child's self-expression, motivating children to discover and search through books to encourage the habit of reading.

The newsletter was **used** for personal education, learning from others' experiences and the training of workers.

The language was deemed simple and understandable.

The layout was generally agreeable.

Readers expressed readiness to **contribute** to the content by sending life experiences, news and reports of activities.

Some general recommendations were made:

- To address the issue of children's difficult behaviour, and ways of handling it.
- To introduce a 'consultative section' on matters facing the workers in the field.
- To analyse the main theme with different approaches, in order to cover all its aspects.

What is Qatr Annada

It is an Arabic newsletter of early childhood education and development for the Arab region. It looks forward towards becoming a tool to disseminate knowledge, a meeting place for dialogue, a contribution towards enhancing networking among institutions and individuals through field and academic activities, and a means to inform about resources pertaining to Early Childhood - written, and audiovisual.

Qatr an Nada invites its readers to make use of it, and participate in its outreach and enrich it with their academic and field experience.

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Yearly Subscription Details:

- Individuals and Non profit Organisations:
 - Arab countries \$10
 - Other countries \$20
- Other Organisations:
 - Arab countries \$20
 - Other countries \$40

Previous Issues (available in Arabic):

Issue one: Partnership with parents.

Issue three: Inclusion in Early Childhood

Coming Issues (in English):

Issue three: Inclusion in Early Childhood (June 99)

Issue four: Assessment and Indicators (August 99)

The Arab Resource Collective (ARC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation formed to produce books, teaching aids and other educational resources in Arabic, for the use of community workers in health, education and development projects, and to facilitate communication and networking among workers and organisations in the Arab World.

