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# Programme Delivery and Approaches to Curriculum Development in Selected Countries of the Arab Region

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**T**he purpose of this paper is to present innovative literacy programmes in the Arab region in relation to curriculum development and programme delivery. It focuses on innovations which make these programmes potentially replicable, either by civil society implementers and national agencies of adult learning. It identifies elements which render these curricula and programmes effective and establishes a baseline of innovations which abound in the Arab region but with a focus on a selected number of countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, Morocco and Sudan.

The study attempts to determine how programme content is conceived, whether it is based on learners' needs, life-skills, local knowledge and skill level of facilitators. It further focuses on the actors who undertake and participate in curriculum development, the manner of the development – participatory or top down, - and the degree of flexibility which the curriculum enjoys.

In spite of progress made in addressing the low levels of literacy in the Arab region, countries are 'weighed down by the burden of about 60 million illiterate adults, i.e. 40% of all adults, most of them impoverished and rural women' (UNDP, 2005). Furthermore, around 10 million out-of-school children contribute to a future swelling in the ranks of illiterates (UNESCO, 2003).

In view of the staggering number of illiterates living in the region and the burden they constitute for its economic and social development, it has become imperative for concerted efforts to mainstream best practice towards concrete action. Innovations and non-conventional approaches are sorely needed for real results to be achieved. Both the governmental and the non-profit, community-based sector have been contributing significantly towards the testing of new approaches. Recent action research efforts have explored new modalities, approaches and methods in addressing the question of literacy in the Arab region.

UNESCO recently published the study 'Synergies Between Formal and Non-formal Education: An Overview of Good Practices' to illustrate how national Ministries of Education in Latin America, Asia and Pacific, the Arab States and Africa are beginning to create 'synergies' with non-formal education providers (Dada et al., 2006). Experience from the Arab region points to the importance of non-formal education in its capacity to reach out to under-served, hard-to-reach, disadvantaged groups, and in its ability to develop and adopt new approaches and new methodologies.

UNESCO recommends several strategies for literacy work at the country level with a view towards achieving education for all. Among them is the recommendation to place the contribution of non-formal education to literacy at the forefront of policy discussions, programme planning and implementation in matters of poverty reduction, and socio-economic and educational development (UNESCO, 2004b). These recommendations are also articulated in the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) which calls on governments to place literacy at the centre of national priorities, to give equal importance to the formal and non-formal education sectors and to ensure community involvement in literacy programmes to promote local ownership (A/RES/57/218).

The World Bank has also recognized the impact of adult education programmes built on civil society efforts and 'embarked on a major effort to support NGOs as the providers of service in Ghana, Senegal and Morocco' (UNESCO, 2000b).

## **Curriculum Development – An Overview of the Situation in the Arab Region**

A general overview of policies, programmes and approaches in the Arab region demonstrates that adult education is generally still perceived by governments and their implementing agencies as literacy in the traditional or rather narrow definition of acquisition of basic reading, writing and numeracy skills (UNESCO, 2004b).

### ***Programme Design***

A few countries, such as Sudan and Morocco, have placed literacy within the context of development showing the link between development and education (UN, 2001; UN, 2002). They have adopted a strong partnership with civil society organizations, most notably community-based associations (CDA's), counting their relationship with grass roots organizations a programmatic strength in content design, as well as programme delivery. In Morocco the Zakoura Foundation is a strong partner with the adult and non-formal learning government agency, bringing in funds to undertake programme design, mobilize local communities and allocate resources to the establishment and management of literacy classes and programmes at the community level. In Sudan the SOLO (Sudan Open Learning Organization) programme brings the University and the community together to design programmes linked to rural development and learners' needs in that context. Such programmes invest in considerable community needs assessment, spending time with people in local communities to learn about their lifestyles, values, economic activities, preferences, needs and vernacular languages. In other countries, such as Egypt, literacy programmes have been linked to development through some NGOs. The Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE) and the Spirit of Youth (SoY) Recycling schools have woven a curriculum around recycling, income generation, business mathematics, marketing and women's empowerment through legal literacy and reproductive health. The Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) weaves its curriculum around its main development programme: Grameen-style micro credit. However, the national curriculum is still standardized and applied to all contexts – rural, urban, coastal, Bedouin, etc. – in a uniform manner.

### ***Teachers and Facilitators***

Most Arab states face the challenge of poorly trained literacy facilitators and the problems of adequate remuneration and retention. No teacher credentialing is required. A common practice of using local community facilitators and local formal school teachers is adopted. Deployment of qualified teachers to remote areas over large geographic distances is a major challenge towards provision of learning facilities with educators. Community-based organizations (CBO's) overcome this challenge by selecting facilitators from the communities. This is tantamount to investing in the volunteerism of local communities and ensuring that teachers will be close to community lifestyle, as well as language and cultural values. When facilitators are from the community, they are accountable to the community for their regularity and performance. They are not delinquent in programme delivery as when they are accountable to a central agency that is not close to the community and when their status is closer to bureaucrats than community mobilizers.

These CBOs obtain the support of donor agencies and intermediate, professional NGOs, to insert their facilitators in professional preparation programmes which are not accredited by the state but lead to higher quality of programme delivery. In Egypt, Caritas plays such a central training role to other, smaller CBOs as well as to its own cadre of facilitators. The Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) does the same. Such organizations have been instrumental in developing cadres of facilitators and programme managers, but their reach is still limited compared to formal government literacy programmes. Effective programmes have gained experience and have graduated to producing organizations which are now qualified to provide training and technical assistance to smaller and more local organizations still embarking on the first stages of programme design and delivery. There appears to be a major opportunity to use the capacities of some these qualified organizations in upgrading the skill set and performance of facilitators in government-led literacy programmes.

### ***Curriculum and Teaching Materials***

Countries which have adopted a community-based, decentralized approach to literacy programme design and implementation, have been in a better position to reflect community needs and interests in their curriculum and teaching materials. Whereas countries which have adopted a central approach to design, management and implementation have found it more difficult to respond to real community learning needs. Materials and content have thus been centrally designed, irrelevant to the interests of the learners and removed from their concrete realities. It is noteworthy that even when a centrally designed curriculum exists, most countries in the region do not place restrictions on using other curricula available

from other sources within one country. This has led to the development of numerous curricula emanating from the NGO sector.

Thus curricula exist around such diverse issues such as health (Warshet el Mawared el Arabeyya, or *Arab Resource Collective*, ARC, Lebanon, Save the Children, Egypt), legal issues particularly those affecting women (Al Mar'a wal Mogtama', Egypt, CAWTAR, Tunis), around water and sanitation (Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services – CEOSS, Egypt and CARE (a humanitarian organization) Egypt), puppet theatre (Association of Upper Egypt, Egypt), recycling (Spirit of Youth Association for Environmental Services, Egypt), drama and the arts ( El Warsha Theatre Troupe with the Jesuit and Brothers Association, Minya, Egypt), agriculture (SOLO, Sudan), organic farming (SOLO, Sudan), and Fishermen's Literacy Curriculum (Morocco).

In Sudan, Morocco and some parts of Egypt, these curricula have been conceived from the local perspective. They are based on the needs of fishing communities or remote populations living in dispersed mountain regions (Morocco), or recycling communities or rural girls in the Southern provinces of rural Egypt. In these cases curriculum development is preceded with an assessment of learners' life contexts, occupations, interests, and needs. The vocabulary of the curriculum is constructed with the learners. Programme developers subsequently go on to compile teaching materials, primers, workbooks, and activities (songs, drama, puppet theatre, etc.) around the topics identified by the learners. Curriculum development can be an iterative process (Egypt) or a complete preparation cycle after which the curriculum is revisited and refined after usage for a number of years (Morocco).

In Egypt and Morocco as well as Sudan, Jordan and Tunis, local knowledge of learners is the basis on which content and delivery methods are designed and prepared for delivery. For instance, in Tunis, Morocco, and Egypt, curriculum specially designed for learners with disabilities is conceived and implemented from the specific context of learners with disabilities. It is significant to note that when this was done in all five countries, people with physical impairment were able to advance to the use of computers, adopt behaviours which reflected their acquisition of life-skills and achieve integration in their local communities which people with similar difficulties but with no access to such programmes, had not been able to acquire. Learners with no physical disabilities but with specific learning needs, such as fishing, farming, health, recycling, etc. had all acquired a level of literacy linked to the specific market based activity they were already engaged in. Facilitators' skills did not constitute the main departure point in designing curriculum. Rather, it was the learners' needs and life contexts. However, hiring facilitators from the community meant that they were involved in the curriculum design and programme development. This compensated for their lack of professional preparation and accreditation, but this was provided later in all four countries, Sudan, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, after a needs assessment of facilitators' needs had uncovered their need for professional development in teaching methods.

All countries have a standardized examination which is offered by the national adult literacy agency and which is used to measure acquisition of literacy. It allows access to numerous official documents, such as a driver's licence, registration of businesses (at the Small and Medium Enterprise levels), engagement in formal employment, or procurement of contract to work in Gulf countries.

### ***Post Literacy Learning Materials***

The dearth of attractive and relevant reading materials for neo-literates remains a major global challenge. The situation is no different in the Arab region. Non-formal learning programmes operating in the non-profit sector have addressed this by inviting learners to write their own stories, and by linking reading materials to income generating activities, civic engagement content, basic water and sanitation issues and culture and the arts. These are reproduced and disseminated on a very local level using simple means and remain restricted to the immediate community which produced them.

### ***Learning Facilities***

Evidence reveals the general practice of taking advantage of locally available space, using mosques, churches, community development associations, schools, youth centres, women's clubs, or people's homes, as learning places. There is variation in the level of equipping of these facilities reflecting the diverse understanding of learners' real needs versus the conventional perception of how to equip a standard adult learning centre. Thus in some countries, low cost local building materials are used or classes are held

under the shade of a tree, while others feel a physical classroom is a necessary structure for adult learning to occur.

### ***Implementation Approaches: Partnerships and Community Participation***

The concept of partnership varies from one country to the next with regards to involving communities, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, academia and the media. In some, local communities are a prime entry point to literacy programmes; with requests coming from community-based organizations being the main criteria for targeting and intervention by centrally driven state programmes (e.g. Morocco). This has been found to energize civil society action towards adult learning so much so that some state-run adult education programmes are struggling to respond to the huge demand which has been generated for literacy in local communities.

In other countries, the adult education authority collaborates with NGOs peripherally or with a handful of leading NGOs which specialize in adult literacy. In these countries, there is no evidence that this collaboration has led to the adoption of one vision, or that it has fostered a debate around approaches, methodologies or process and content. The state-run adult agency still considers itself the main source of expertise on the matter and innovations occurring at the community level do not become mainstreamed into national programmes. The absence of linkages allowing local community practice to filter to formal sector classroom practice is an issue which calls for more linkages between the formal and non-formal learning sectors and greater synergies between the two.

At the other end of the spectrum, civil society organizations are viewed as an unknown entity and NGO activity in the area of education and development is largely unknown to the public, much less to officials in the adult education and literacy sector. Limited private sector partnerships with civil society are evident in most Arab states. Where they exist, they do so in the form of financial and in-kind contributions. Provision of literacy instruction to workers in private enterprises still falls short of equipping unskilled workers with literacy skills. The private sector still does not perceive the high rates of illiteracy in their respective countries as an economic issue with implications to their businesses in particular, or to the national business climate in general. Similarly, academic institutions are not reported to invest significant interest or funding in research around literacy, its links to poverty, development and the emerging implications for sustainable livelihoods, or environmental management, for example. In some countries, there is outright resistance to mobilizing graduates in literacy instruction to villages and informal settlements, in spite of the existence of laws and decrees which promulgate that engagement.

As for cooperatives, syndicates and youth groups, the research indicates that the field is wide open to mobilizing them as partners for future programming.

## **Emerging Innovations**

Amid these developments, a number of innovative approaches and programmes in the Arab region have begun establishing their practice. However, information on them is scant (UNESCO, 2000b). This paucity of research contributes to the persistence of limited expansion of innovation and the continued perception of non-formal education programmes by official government programmes as non-valid and 'second rate' (Dada et al., 2006). Nonetheless, the diversity and flexibility of these programmes offers learners unique opportunities for sustained growth and engagement in a dynamic learning environment.

The freedom from constraints surrounding programme planning, supervision and implementation raises the ability of programme content and delivery to respond to learners' needs, real life situations and socio-economic-political and cultural contexts. Thus a literacy programme which revolves around the procurement of official documents, e.g. identity cards or birth certificates for women (Caritas Egypt, ADEW, CEOSS) leads to village women learning to demand better infrastructure and basic services from local municipalities. Likewise, literacy around small savings groups, lays the groundwork for group action on community matters. Group borrowing and lending schemes build solidarity among the illiterate, poor learners. The curriculum and andragogical processes allow the learning to flow into actions which translate into improved community life. These are equivalent to grades on an examination. In these models, learners are not required to sit for an examination. Their very actions toward public life are the

examination, and the grades are the measure with which they are able to influence their personal and community life.

Existing research points to the positive impacts of programme design elements which do not place minimum or maximum age limits as a precondition for enrolment, scheduling which allows learners to engage in learning within local livelihood schedules, the ability to enter and exit from programmes at various points in the process, the diversity of learners who take advantage of out-of-school learning - such as dropout children and youths, working children, disabled people, learners in detention centres and prisons, rural youths and adults, and women in remote and under-served communities. Approaches range from a complementary one which seeks to bring learners up to formal level examination standards so that they can become mainstreamed into the formal system, to one which is designed and delivered around its own conceptual framework, based on specific and contextualized goals, and which is measured by development indicators which vary greatly from standardized tests. A great deal of time is invested in understanding local realities, engaging learners in discussions around their basic needs, their aspirations, their dreams and their capabilities.

***Happily, in 2006 the situation has changed. For while efforts are still scattered, fragmented and undocumented, yet a dynamic and expansive variety of approaches which address a broad range of issues has begun to emerge.***

The Arab Education Forum (*Al Moltaqa al Araby*) documents a vast range of the diversity in learning which exists in the Arab world. They describe the programming methods and impacts of arts and culture programmes conducted by *El Warsba* theater troupe in Egypt, the *Mokattam Garbage Collectors'* community learning approach, the *Tamer Institute* in Palestine's work with reading among children in occupied Palestine, the youth writing project in Lebanon and Jordan (*Qalb el Omour* – the Heart of Matters) as well as a broad range of literacy practices on the global level.

The website of the forum describes the effects of local theatre groups mentored by *El Warsba* on local community engagement, expression and action. The work of the Cairo recyclers links globalization to learning content where learners read maps of the city as an integral part of the reading and writing of street names, in preparation to become contractually engaged with municipalities when multinational contracts expire in ten years. Literacy among children in occupied Palestine is not just about reading and writing words but also about expressing the realities of occupation and aggression in the lives of children. And youths writing about the aspirations and tensions of growing up in the Arab region are published by youths themselves through the *Qalb el Omour* writing and newsletter project.

*Al Janna* theatre group in Lebanon works with the artistic expression that is an integral part of literacy among children in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The Arab Resource Collective gathers health practitioners at the grass roots level from many countries in the Arab world and engages them in writing workshops where facilitators and programme developers together design materials for use around health literacy. These are tested locally in each country, and a last round of final publishing occurs. Users of the curriculum are encouraged to contextualize and adapt content to local realities.

Programmes are delivered in a multiplicity of venues ranging from a water stand post, to a health clinic, to a learner's home or a structured classroom. Learning by doing is a principal feature of teaching methods while exchange field visits and study tours add dynamism to programme delivery methods. Scheduling for programme delivery remains highly flexible and responsive to learners' schedules.

Programme responsiveness to learners' needs has led to a great diversity in programme goals and objectives, programme levels, design, content, teaching and learning methods, programme management and implementation, as well as measurement of learning. The broad range of programmatic diversity encompasses life-skills, public awareness, legal literacy, livelihoods (animal husbandry, agriculture, micro credit, etc.), extension services, civic engagement, culture and the arts, recreation and rehabilitative content (e.g. for drug addicts, learners with disabilities).

The research points to non-formal education initiatives being scattered in and across the region, working in relative isolation; their impact remains difficult to assess, and the range of issues addressed in these programmes seems still seems rather limited. A variety of approaches are presented here below.

#### Empowering Learners - A Centrepiece of Effective Programme Delivery

Programmes in the Arab region have been effective when programme developers have recognized that the acquisition of literacy in and of itself was not enough to equip people with the tools required to engage dynamically as active citizens in society. Such programmes spring from the belief that literacy is fundamentally about initiating and sustaining an empowering process of individual growth and self

development. These values drive the approach, programme design, content design and delivery, and move into assessment of learning outcomes.

Thus successful programmes have revolved around micro-credit, legal literacy and procurement of official civil registry documents, water and sanitation, agriculture for small farmers, handicrafts for rural women, and more.

In Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Morocco and Egypt curricula around all these subjects have been produced, used, refined and contextualized with great effectiveness. In Morocco innovative curricula for fishermen and specific population groups have been produced. In Tunisia, curriculum for disabled groups has been widely disseminated. In Egypt, recycling has formed the crux of curriculum in the waste management communities in Cairo. Special curricula for street children have also been developed by Hope Village Society and Caritas in Egypt. In Yemen, the Reflect Mother Manual is being tested and adapted for the Arab region. The curriculum around primary health care compiled by the Arab Resource Collective has now become widely distributed in the entire Arab region. In several of these countries, curriculum around culture and the arts has been shared among community learning groups. By contrast the centrally driven, standardized, approach to literacy education still adopted by official programmes in the Arab region does not take this aspect into consideration and does not favourably respond to it. They continue to use the widespread teacher-led classroom approach which does not address fundamental needs of learners to become empowered, active citizens. This is reflected in poor learner motivation and retention, and the interrupted process of lifelong learning. Programmes which are based on the mechanistic delivery of units, modules and curricula so that they can confidently claim to have *finished* the content and which measure learner acquisition only by a standardized examination without measuring impact on learners' lives are characteristic for many of the state-run literacy programmes in countries such as Yemen and Egypt. These have not produced any evidence that the number of hours learners spend poring over textbooks and in classrooms concretely lead to the use of that threshold of reading and writing in the broader world of engaging in community life. In fact, there is evidence that after the examination, many learners lapse into illiteracy.

### ***Learner Motivation - A Key Dimension for Continued Success and Sustainability***

A key finding of field-based practice is that it is not enough to simply offer literacy classes and get as many illiterates as possible enrolled. Programmes in the Arab region that have built tangible benefits to

*The motivation of learners to remain in literacy classes occurs because learners see a connection between the content and their daily lives and recognize the benefit of their acquired knowledge to their lives*

learners around the written word are the ones which have achieved a higher retention and continuation rate and have recorded a measure of success and effectiveness. In Caritas Egypt's programme for village women, learners frequent programmes because literacy content is linked to their procurement of identity cards, to their ability to secure services from local municipalities, and to credit programmes. They frequent village libraries after they have acquired basic literacy skills because of the pleasure of reading offered by stocked bookshelves as well as the chance to socialize with other village women and mobilize around issues which concern them

directly. The same describes the programmes offered by primary health programmes whether they use the Arab Resource Collective curriculum or other locally designed curricula. Such programmes do not end with the completion of a 'curriculum' in a text book or with the successful passing of an examination.

*The centrality of empowerment in the innovative approaches has meant that literacy revolves around issues which learners feel are vital for their survival and well-being.*

Rather they link post literacy to what learners consider to be important facets of their lives, be it civic engagement, agriculture, rural and urban based small enterprises, assisting children with school homework, health and legal literacy, reading religious texts, and the sheer enjoyment of reading through village libraries.

By contrast, learner motivation and retention has generally remained low in government-led programmes. These centrally driven, standardized programmes face the challenge of designing curricula that respond to the diversity of learner's needs in ways that empower them functionally, civically and politically.

### ***Literacy and Development - Lifelong Learning Processes***

***The interdisciplinary literacy curriculum and multidisciplinary aspects of development are woven to produce a dynamic lifelong learning context for transformational change.***

There is increasing evidence in the Arab region of the significant outcomes of learning when basic reading and writing skills are integrated into a broad range of development objectives. Learners apply their skills towards their multifaceted real life needs, without the fear of failure encountered in formal education or technical

vocational systems (UNESCO, 2000b). Issues span across economic, environmental, social, financial, and political sectors. Examples abound for literacy programmes built on or including issues such as primary health care (Arab Resource Collective, Caritas, CEOSS, Save the Children Foundation, and CARE), personal and environmental hygiene, business mathematics, computer literacy, foreign language (English), principles of project management, book keeping and simple accounting or office skills. Experience shows that multi-disciplinary approaches to education and multi-sectoral approaches to development are complementary and that literacy and development can be intertwined to transform lives. Farmers in rural village programmes organized by CEOSS, women in the micro credit programme organized by the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) in Egypt, fishermen in the Moroccan programme, all demonstrably stay in programmes because learning content is directly linked to their development needs.

While literacy is not simply about development, development projects have been found to provide invaluable non-formal learning settings where individuals learn new problem-solving ways of thinking, new work methods, and where new ideas are inculcated into the minds of those who participate. These go on to change the face of their community and reality.

### ***Innovation – An Essential Feature of Effective Literacy Programmes***

Illiterate communities cannot break out of their cycle of poverty and oppression if they remain illiterate. Paulo Freire gave us the empowering conscientization approach which he tested in Brazil (*for a review of his books see [http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel\\_sc/freire/freirebooks.html](http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel_sc/freire/freirebooks.html)*). Robert Chambers gave us the Participatory Rapid (Rural) Appraisal approach which he tested with farmers in many parts of the world

***The challenge, therefore, for all programs and projects engaged in the empowerment of the disenfranchised, is to find innovative ways of designing programs and content to breed a desire for literacy, by linking the vocabulary and activities to real needs and contexts as well as aspirations and joys.***

(see as a resource book at <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sourcebook/sba104.htm>). And the Reflect approach has integrated the two into its innovative programme design and delivery methods. Reflect has been piloted in Yemen, currently in 52 women's centres, through CARE. The Arab Resource Collective (ARC) has pioneered learning in the area of health, the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR) has pioneered gender-sensitive curriculum, approaches and materials, and Caritas Egypt has developed literacy materials

which are now used on a national level (*ta'allam tabarrar*).

Other innovative programmes mentioned earlier in this paper have been tested in the Arab region. However their local nature has not allowed them to enjoy the widespread recognition or validation from the broader community of practitioners. In some programmes, the focus of programme content and delivery centred around marginalized learners' source of hope. Curriculum was woven around that hope that learners can change their reality: the reality of exclusion, and the oppression of poverty. Words expressing that hope constituted the vocabulary. Individualized instruction, self-paced acquisition and assessment shaped teaching methods.

***Decentralization is about how the mastery of the technology of writing constitutes a threshold where communities' latent knowledge and skills, resources, diversity, are all used for the preparation for people's new responsibilities in the new social contract, and where reading and writing are placed squarely on the holistic multiple literacies map.***

### ***Decentralization – A Significant Factor in Programme Effectiveness***

Decentralization has been found to be a key ingredient in successful literacy programmes.

Focusing on the conventional transmission of standard literacy in adult classrooms has been found to lag further and further behind the complexity of social forms of communication as they develop with communities undergoing dramatic change. Practitioners have concluded that alternatives to centrally designed programmes bring forth the diversity of meanings which adults create from texts and situations in a post-literacy environment. But the decentralization meant here is not just duplicating central level bureaucracies at regional levels. It is more about how the mastery of the technology of writing leads communities to a higher threshold of institutional development at the local level.

### ***Tailoring – A Key Choice***

Language of instruction: While it is important to teach people to communicate in the language of the power elites, yet the written word is not the only kind of literacy required to do that. Other tools are required to assist people develop an understanding of how the world functions. This understanding is necessarily shaped by their surroundings and everyday culture. A number of practices around tailoring educational content to the specific backgrounds and needs of diverse groups of learners were found. Appropriate tools are transmitted through various empowering learning situations that lead to problem solving, decision-making, and free informed choices. These learning 'modules' equip people with the tools necessary for living in an unjust world that treats illiterates as inconsequential individuals. The debate about whether to use classical Arabic or colloquial Arabic or an intermediate version of the two still rages in the Arab region. Locally constructed and designed curricula choose a variation of the two and since they are not constrained by having learners submit to official examinations, they teach learners enough classical Arabic to be able to sit for the national literacy exam but allow them to enjoy reading in the vernacular, and design lessons around health, farming, or the environment, using words which learners would use in everyday varieties of their language.

Participation in Design of Programme: Innovations are underlined by a belief that communities possess latent knowledge and skills, resources, diversity – necessary ingredients for people's inclusion in society and polity; ready to play their new roles in the new social order now imperative for Arab nations and their people. Learners are capable of becoming directly involved in developing their own literacy materials that are relevant to current issues affecting their lives. They have been found to take leadership in strengthening the learning environment for themselves and other community members in ways that learners in the traditional classroom do not.

Unschooling people do not necessarily see themselves as illiterate; they attach value to their own 'common sense' or 'practical' ways which are more reliable than 'school knowledge'. Thus conventional transmission of standard literacy in adult classrooms will not address needs of equipping learners with a wide range of complex social forms of communication. These develop within communities, not classrooms, particularly in periods of social, economic and political change. A case in point is 'Women's Literacy' programmes taking stock of women's realities; these differ in time and place. Functional literacy programmes have been documented where women are trained in critical life-skills and trade-related activities, but also in parenting needs and the cultural aspects of reading and writing, expressing and participating in community and society.

Non-formal sector linkages to the formal education sectors play a critical role in economies in transition facing socio-political transformations. In countries undergoing major political and economic transformations, adult basic education and literacy programmes are increasingly called on to link the non-formal to the formal education sectors (UNESCO, 2000b). It is suggested that these links are established through professional development, post-literacy, and work-related instruction. Follow-on programmes, school entry, and job training are all areas where linkages between the formal and non-formal have been successfully forged in a number of experiments in the Arab region.

Pedagogical approaches: Traditional teacher-led classroom instruction does not address adults' multifaceted learning needs: Tailoring also encompasses choices about who is to lead the learning process. In many successful programmes, learners have become directly involved in developing their own literacy materials. Mother-child literacy programmes have assisted mothers in parenting and helped illiterate mothers acquire a measure of literacy to assist children with primary school reading material.

### ***Gender Aspects of Content Development and Material Preparation***

While countries in the Arab region recognize the critical value of achieving gender balance in literacy and learning, yet results still fall short of expectations. It is widely acknowledged that increases in national levels of female literacy tend to accompany lower rates of infant mortality and maternal mortality in childbirth, better children's health, higher school enrolment rates among girls and even lower fertility rates (UNESCO, 2004b). Likewise, it is upheld that children with educated mothers are twice as likely to be in school as those with mothers with no formal education (UN, 2005). Yet as attested by the Education for All 2000 Assessment: 'Of the areas in greatest need of innovation, there is none higher than that of literacy for women and within the family' (UNESCO, 2000b). The Report refers to women's literacy programmes made by some governments and agencies 'without fully understanding what would make a women's programme different from that of a male-oriented programme' (UNESCO, 2000b).

In general Arab women remain poorly prepared to participate effectively and fruitfully in public life by acquiring knowledge through education, despite the tremendous expansion in female education in Arab countries. Furthermore, success in increasing female enrolment in schools does not mean success in eradicating female illiteracy overall (UNDP, 2005). The Arab region still has one of the world's lowest rates of female education, i.e., one of the highest rates of illiteracy (one half of females are illiterate compared to only one third of males), and of enrolment opportunities at the various levels of education, especially that of higher education (*ibid.*). The highest relative rate of deprivation of education occurs in the less developed Arab countries, such as Djibouti and Yemen, and in those with the largest populations, such as Egypt, Morocco and Sudan.

In the formal education and the formal employment sector, the traditional view still prevails that the man is the breadwinner and this leads to a lower economic participation of Arab women the lowest in the world: 33.3% of women 15 years and older in contrast to the world average of 55.6%. However, in the low-income economies women work primarily in agriculture under conditions of poverty, or they tend to find jobs in the services sector, which in the Arab world is characterized by low productivity and low remuneration. Furthermore, women lose more years to disease than men, Dependency ratios in the Arab region remain the highest in the world, with each worker supporting more than two non-working people, compared to less than one in East Asia. According to the Report, the principal reason for this is the low rate of participation by women.

Despite some relative successes on gender issues, the Arab region's rank on gender empowerment is still low. Egypt ranked 99<sup>th</sup> with a GDI value of 0.634 in the Gender Related Development Index for 144 countries (UNDP, 2004). In another international study that measured the global gender gap of 58 countries, World Economic Forum 2005, Egypt ranked 58<sup>th</sup>. Similar indicators can be presented for many Arab countries.

Likewise while substantial improvements in female literacy and enrolment rates have been made, as well as in female labour force participation, yet a gender gap persists in favour of males in the Arab region. The trend seems to be moving slowly towards eliminating gender inequality, but the pace at which it is progressing is not rapid enough to keep up with major trends in the region towards opening up to global markets, dialogue and democratization.

In the absence of pensions plans or a national insurance network, as is the case of several Arab countries, the strains on women in providing care for children and the sick, elderly, disabled and handicapped without sufficient social support continue to grow. Female learners are often in the situation of being entrusted with the care of small children, even if they are not the biological mothers. Experiments in the Arab region point to the existence of programmes designed especially to respond to this reality so that women and children can enjoy an integrated learning experience that is beneficial to both. The Moroccan programme operated by the Foundation ALIF LAM for family literacy has college students work with their relatives and community adult learners in the homes. However, relatively few literacy and adult education planners have taken this need into account.

A large number of women's unions, NGOs and Community Development Associations (CDAs) in all countries of the Arab region offer non-formal literacy and education programmes for women. However, few linkages among them allow for the exchange of information and experiences, essential for regional impact of best practices. The climate has not been conducive to the establishment of independent civil society organisations with a regional scope, and in networking among organisations with similar mandates across borders.

The Tunis based Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWATAR) is a notable example of such a network. The Arab Network of Adult Education NGOs is another and the Arab Council for

Childhood a third. These provide a forum for discussion and exchange of information, training resources and opportunities, research studies and reports, background papers, trainers' guides, toolkits, documentaries and other information and training resources, E-Learning opportunities, regional conferences and joint projects with international organizations.

## **Major Findings and Conclusions**

### ***Clear Vision about Literacy***

Successful programmes do not view their work as an enterprise leading to addressing literacy gaps or 'closing the sources of illiteracy'. They have a clear vision about the *centrality of justice and empowerment* and full participation of citizens in their communities and the wider national community in mind when shaping programme content and designing programme delivery methods.

### ***Understanding of Literacy as a Process and not just an Activity***

Successful programmes were not designed to correct formal education sector shortcomings – i.e. coping with the increasing numbers of illiterates added each year. Rather, programmes were conceived and designed as a *lifelong process* where gradual transformation of the individual learner had to be reflected in collective learning of the community. This was therefore not a process geared to a standard textbook, number of modules or finite content with specific start and end points. It is rather one that designs learning and measures its outcomes by using transformational aspects of the individual and the community combined.

### ***An Expansive View of Partnership***

In view of the current poor performance of the formal sector of education in the Arab region, the non-profit literacy and basic adult education sector has had to forge partnerships with community groups intervening in the sector. These have reached heretofore excluded segments of the population, such as street children, working children, dropout children, un-enrolled girls, illiterate youths, rural women, unskilled youths, and working men. Learners take leadership in strengthening the learning environment for themselves and other community members in ways that learners in the traditional classroom do not. These partnerships have meant that programme delivery and content have had to be tailored and built around the realities of partners - individuals and groups. Partnerships have further included faith-based organizations and the private sector to support these initiatives financially.

### ***Literacy Approaches in Tandem with International Conventions and Programmes***

A close scrutiny of successful models uncovered in the Arab region points to the use of approaches which are in concert with international conventions, such as the Rights-Based Approach, the Child's Rights Approach, and the Millennium Development Goals, and UNESCO's UNLD with its various themes: gender, sustainable development, health, empowerment, and peace.

In conclusion, it is our assessment that the research uncovers programme design and delivery models in the Arab region which provide a diversity and vitality that can be used for future programming. Evidence points to the effectiveness of locally driven programmes which are close to learners' needs, are flexible, responsive and learner-driven rather than teacher-driven. Alternatives to centrally designed programmes are therefore inevitable. They will encourage the diversity of meanings which adults create from texts and situations in a post literacy environment, and will lead to the acquisition of literacy in all its senses.

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