



Population Policies and Migration Department
League of Arab States

ARAB YOUTH ISSUES

" Arab Youth Participation "

ANNUAL REPORT: 2007

Executive Summary

SERIES ON POPULATION & DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

This report is the third publication of the “Arab Youth issues” series of the year 2007, as a part of “Arab Youth Observatory” project, which is executed by (Population policies and migration department – League of Arab States) in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).



Executive Summary

This report is the third of publications related to Arab youth issues which is one of the activities of the Arab Youth Empowerment project implemented by the League of Arab States/Department of Population Studies and Migration in cooperation with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The report aims at revealing the point of view of Arab youth, the questions they raise and the confusion in which they live, to a point that has them shed doubts on some of the issues and practices surrounding them.

This confusion is a result of the youth's awareness of their qualitative reality within the context of their social reality as it interacts with drastic global transformations; the impact of knowledge, information and communication trends which posed challenges and also provided them with an opportunity to new forms of education and to new issues regarding human rights, citizenship, democracy and participation.

The report, with its focus on empowerment and participation, addresses several problematic issues on the theoretical, conceptual, knowledge and real life levels related to Youth participation.

This report attempts to answer some questions that may seem simple:

- Why that accelerating rise of youth issues in the international formal discourse?
- What is realistic in this discourse and how has it evolved? In other words, what has changed in terms of demography, thought and research to replace vertical analysis of human societies (classes, rich, poor, powerless,) with horizontal categorical analysis (children, youth, women)?
- Is that change relevant to changes in the social system and conditions or is it an alternation of the perspective to suit economic, political and maybe specific ideological interests?

Maybe that change is related to all of the above. "A. Toffler" said that the major changes that stormed the globe affected the concepts of sustainable development, empowerment and participation. In these new concepts, youth are said to be the driving force of societal change. Indeed, the emergence of a set of international demographic realities led to the focus on youth as the population of developed countries started aging and thus diminishing the labour force.

In his important book "Mac World", Carl Berger stressed that politically and economically youth are the future of Globalization.

Other problematic issues addressed explaining the reality of youth participation and understanding and explaining the factors and changes affecting it, especially the supporting culture to youth participation as a way to empowerment.

This report was also concerned with addressing the roots and definitions of the basic concepts and terminologies, especially the inter-dependant relation between "empowerment" and "participation".

The extensive studies of the linguistic, conceptual and realistic implications of the term "empowerment" concluding that there are two dimensions to the term:

1. the first leads to igniting the ability to act which stems from intrinsic factors that produce labour energy which is manifested by ambitions and needs of the "youth spirit".

2. the second dimension is in the "overall control" or the combined capabilities which relies on the deeper and more sophisticated interactions within the larger social structure.

As for "participation", a number of procedural definitions were employed in field studies regarding youth participation. If it appears to the reader that some of these definitions are contradictory, a closer in-depth reading of their significance and focus will show that they are complimentary because each definition focused on some dimensions it deemed important. Nevertheless, these definitions share commonalities especially in regard to youth participation in decisions related to them and the development of their communities, a participation that means sharing of power with the entities in charge (family/state facilities/civil society organizations).

Hence, the report adopted a more holistic and comprehensive definition of participation with all its political and social dimensions and levels based on social compliance defined by legislative rules and laws (ex. political elections). The primary aim of this focus was to draw the attention of those setting youth policies to other types and forms of authority figure resistance to youth participation through deriving reasons to obstruct youth participation in actual and even symbolic decision making. Hence, the report was keen on dissecting the concept of participation to secondary elements that included what is known as the "ladder of participation", which starts by expression of one's opinion to cooperating with others to accomplish some activities and even participation in decision making.

The report also distinguished between: positive and negative participation.

Negative participation is defined here as the youth conscious decision not to participate in organized political activities (i.e.: elections), considering that political participation is at the top of the participation ladder since it is connected with present and future decisions that affect the reality of youth and their ambitions.

The report focused on presenting a wider perspective of youth participation opportunities and challenges; calling upon new mechanisms to involve youth. The main outcomes of the field studies, which call for further more comprehensive field surveys, are the following:

- Youth fear authority, and hence their unwillingness to participate increases. Here, authority is not confined to government authority but also includes: the family, the school principal, the college professor, the boss at work, as these figures resort to dominance, so youth maneuver their way around these figures and rarely confront them directly. This unwillingness should not be merely understood in terms of submissiveness and despair but also on the objective grounds of calculating the costs, repercussions and benefits of confrontation which could be seen in political and civil work and even within student unions.
- As Youth choose not to participate politically they relatively participate in NGO's, since these organizations are seen by them as an outlet to free expression and actual contribution that enhances their skills and participation techniques.
- There is a direct correlation between participation and non participation whether on the political or civil level and between the direct and indirect expected benefits including avoiding dangers.
- The report raised the question of how to enhance the political participation of youth in an atmosphere that makes it difficult even for the elderly to participate. The report discussed trends attempting to answer the question. The first trend sees that preparing the youth to participate is an issue of social upbringing in the historical sense, meaning it is associated with social struggles that affirmed acknowledging the right of the governed to choose their rulers which contributed in the making of the participating citizen entrenched in democratic values through varied social upbringing in continuous momentum connected to the life cycle of the citizen. Supporters of this trend see that there is no hope but for societies to go through the different stages of historical experience of democratic systems in haste. The second trend supports the idea of institutionalized arrangements that guarantee the making and

preparing of democratic participatory citizens. Hence, setting and elaborating the rules of the game and defining the parameters and benefits makes the participants comply to these rules regardless of their values and abilities. Here, participation is in no need of years and decades of upbringing in as much as it is in need of institutions, governing procedures and evaluation and accountability mechanisms.

There is a very important brief question that has deep significance and ideological aspects: "Who should participate?" taking the question to fit our context , which Arab youth should participate? Should we target the active elite or all Youth with no distinctions?

There is a trend that supports targeting the elite with the justification that most of the youth don't have the ability, skills and values it takes to participate and not all organizations are available to all youth, and thus we should start by elite effective youth.

While another approach adopted by "Paulo Freire" in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* sees "participation" as a human right that should be offered to all youth equally and that any level of participation is considered a kind of social upbringing , a development to the will of action and an opportunity to acquire skills. Freire trained illiterate and marginalized segments to participate, and by that turned silent individuals to key doers especially in their local communities.

As there are no prior studies about the topic at hand; the Population policies and migration department - LAS performed two field studies, to update our figures about youth participation and fix the problem we had with prior data as they tended to be vague or not well bundled.

The first field study focused on the challenges that face "Youth participation"; depending on filling an e-questionnaire completed by 516 males and females participants. It had different ratios of participants from different Arab countries but it almost resembled the actual ratios, as there were 468 questionnaires filled by participants in Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Iraq, Morocco, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Libya; which are countries representing two-thirds of the Arab population and they belong to (Mashreq, Maghreb and Central) Arab countries.

The age bracket sample 41.4% ranged between 20 and 24, and the age bracket of 25-29 was 47.7%.

The percentage of males was 64.7% and the females 35.3%. 64.2% of the population were college graduates, less than third in high school and 30.8% were college students.

As for the second study, it included samples of youth from 31 Arab NGO's in Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt.

Note:

The individuals that answered the questionnaire reflected a certain level of participation, as they had the initiative to fill it in and re-send it with no pressure or incentives.

These two field studies focused on measuring the Arab youth awareness of participation, where they stand on the issue, how do they practice it , what are the challenges they face and how do perceive motivating more youth to participate.

Field study Outcome:

Awareness of participation:

The awareness that leads to participation, as is the awareness of other societal processes, and as is agreed by most social science literature, is composed of : Perception and Conception.

Perception means the knowledge of youth about the rules and determinants of "Participation". Its not always a complete perception since it is a product of available input from family, education, media, religious institutions, civil organization and the culture of community that determines participation

values whether it was a pop culture or forced by formal institutions.

As for Conception, it is the attitude towards "Participation", whether its reluctant or eager; approved or disapproved, total or partial. In this context, practices may attempt to maintain the status quo if its beneficial to the individual and the group, or attempt to change such an attitude to fulfill the ambitions of development especially that of the youth.

Significance and implication of participation to Youth:

It was logical to ask the sample about the significance and implications of the term "participation" for them. Since the outcome helps in understanding where do they stand vis-a-vis participation?

The questionnaire shows that females tend to care for the functions of participation in developing the social act related to future political change. The majority of females see that participation is a main right of citizenship. 19.8% of females focused on two important issues: liberty based governance and social justice .

As for the males, as they also tackled the issue of the social impact to participation but their answers focused on the roles of the youth themselves and the need for self assurance. 18.4% of them see participation makes an individual a giver.

The second preferred answer for youth was that participation is part of the decision making process with percentage of 16.5%, but 14.8% said that participation enhances society development.

Hence, males focused on empowering the participant before community development, while females focused on social development towards freedom and justice.

What follows is the most important youth perceptions regarding participation:

- Youth (males/females) statistically yearn for participation.

quote	No. of precedence	% of precedence
youth don't care about participation	168	32.5
youth don't want any form of participation	66	12.8
Parties are important in the political arena	281	54.4
youth aren't keen to participate in student unions	185	35.9
youth don't care about political participation	165	32
youth don't trust the political arena	317	61
youth are self-indulgent	225	63.6
participation is a right of citizenship	368	71.3
girl participation in elections is one of her rights	411	79.9

- Their preoccupation with their personal concerns: education, work, social networking does not impede their interest in participation
- 72.3% want to participate politically, but they don't trust the political practices in the Arab world.
- Statistically 71.3% saw that political participation is a right of citizenship, and 79.7% believe it's a women right too.
- According to Gender classification, males are less interested in political participation by 72.3%, and 71.4% see that elderly hinder their participation in NGOs, 69% don't care about all fields of participation. But for females, 40.2% deemed the family the main obstacle to participation, 37.6% mentioned that there are no near by NGOs to their residents which sets a new barrier to participation; while 37.8% of males participate in NGOs.

Such numbers show that females face external barriers to participation, while the male situation is more self-driven as it's correlated to their willingness to participate and the dominance of elder people on such chances of participation.

Previous experiences in Participation:

58.5% of the sample subjects had previous experiences in Participation, with the male percentage at 63.9% which is double that of female experience (36.1%); at the top was participation in volunteer work in NGOs (35.2%) followed by participation in student unions (25.3%) (as 30.8% of the samples are still students).

The participation in parliamentary elections and presenting services in local community both resulted in 15.8%.

89.5% of the samples range between 20 and 29.

Tale showing information and knowledge sources regarding participation:

The knowledge sources for females are limited to the household, like: reading, surfing the net with

	Males		Females	
	%	ordinance	%	ordinance
TV Political shows	24.1	first	19.1	first
Political essays in papers	23.7	first	22	second
Participation though online forums	65.9		34.1	
Online debate	64.1		35.9	
Online political debate	22.5	first	19.4	first

23.7% and 21.2% respectively; followed by 20.3% volunteering in the local community.

For males, surfing the net then volunteer work with 22.6% and 21.6% respectively.

Note:

Although the sample of the field study were mostly not interested in political participation, they were intouch with the latest updates, which means that their reluctance is a conscious decision.

Current situation of Youth Participation:

We determined participation either individually or on group level based on the awareness by issue

Opportunity index	No. of precedence	% of precedence
number of voting card holders	324	62.8
number of who voted in last elections	210	64.8
who participated in local/municipal election	321	99
participating in family affairs	503	97.5
participating in online forums	314	60.9
online dialogue	333	64.5
politics as main topic of online converse	209	21.4
surfing the net as main consumer of leisure time	339	22.1
volunteer work as main consumer of leisure time	324	21.1

and the knowledge of its conditions, necessities and opportunities.

This data draws attention to the fact that although opportunities of participation is depleting and there are certain obstacles facing democratic transformation, there still is a chance for reformation, and youth are the base of such development as they are more involved with future affairs than their counterparts in previous generations.

Based on the above mentioned figure regarding opportunities of participation we can note that:

These results can not be generalized as the sample don't represent the whole Arab youth.

- This a group initiative as they responded to the e-questionnaire on the contrary to others
- They are all educated, either finished their education or still at a certain phase.
- This is a group that has the necessary computer and internet skills that enabled them to fill the questionnaire.

- 60.9% of the sample are participants in online forums.
- Most of the sample comes from a higher Social Economic Standard (SES).

The collected data showed that majority of voting card holders are eager to participate especially those voting in the Parliamentary elections, which contradicts with figures and statistics reached by prior studies on the same issue.

Even though there was a higher participation rate in the Parliamentary elections (64.8%) it was higher in the Municipal elections (99%).

We can justify such difference to the following reasons:

- Those municipal elections are directly connected to the youth needs and ambition especially on the level of the local community they live in.
- That youth are more familiar with the characters of the local elections candidate than those of parliamentary elections.
- The influence of tribal and family bonds can not be neglected as a motive for participation on the local level.

Such outcome is in accordance with the hypotheses analyzing elections in other Arab countries, for example all the studies tackling the issue of elections in Egypt testify that most of the participation in rural areas is more frequent and larger than that in Egyptian Urban areas; as a result of partisanship and family bonds, even though there is a higher illiteracy rate in those areas.

Most of the sample's free time (leisure time) is usually spent in surfing the Internet (21.1%), and 64.1% of those using the internet discuss different issues, with the most repetitive topic being political issues at 21.4%.

Also when asking about their TV habits, political talk shows came at the top of their interests with 34.2%, and in newspapers with 22.1%.

Then come volunteer work with the same percentage of surfing the net at 21.1% to emphasize their willingness to participate either in organized activities such NGOs or local activities.

Main obstacles to Participation:

Obstacles index	.No	%
no opportunity for participation	74	14.3
no knowledge about participation	21	4.1
elderly dominance on participation	79	15.3
youth has many problems	88	17.1
fear of participation	69	13.4
high age bracket for participation	21	4.1
no free time	28	5.4
youth frustration	122	23.6
other	14	2.7
total	516	100

Obstacles to participation can be classified to:

1. obstacles related to the youth themselves
2. objective obstacles related to the status quo of community participation
3. a third set of obstacles which is a mix and match between both the previous types.

Least in precedence is the obstacles related to youth (self-oriented obstacles), which is specifically constrained on the lack of knowledge and lack of time with a percentage of 9.5%.

As for obstacles related to community participation paradigm, its more related to "the other" attitude: elderly dominance, inconvenient legislations of participation and the depletion of participation opportunities with 33.7%.

As for the third set of obstacles, it's considered to be one of the main reasons of participation retreat in the Arab world at a 53.8% of total hindering factors; obstacles range between youth frustration (22.3%) and mounting problems (17.3%) for males and 22.2% and 17.5% for females respectively, which means that those are well connected to their reality and aware of all its problems.

As for males, male dominance came at 16.3%, and females suffering from fear to participate at 15.2%, which reflects the stereotype of females in the Arab society that sees women incapable of participation in the sustainable development of local society. This has its repercussions on women and girls self-image resulting from negative image driven by the social upbringing process starting from the family, to educational institutions, in addition to the negative image of women in the media.

Youth suggestions to enhance participation:

The field study sample came up with many important suggestions to enhance participation, 21.1% sees the only way is to motivate the youth, such an answer has many significances, as more than half of this sample had previous participation experiences and suffered from the previously mentioned obstacles, and that moral incentives related to self expression, gaining expertise, and training are huge motivation energizers.

20.6% mentioned that designing certain programs to train and develop the skills of youth would help, while 20.3% sees that dealing with problems that irritates youth such as unemployment is a great drive. In fourth, came the issue of safe participation, which can be guaranteed through legislations, increasing number of NGOs, advocacy in the media and most importantly space should be offered by the government to boost participation.

Such suggestions differ as priorities between males and females which raises the issue of gender back to the surface. Male youth see that the problem is in the lack of motivation (21.5%) which means there are opportunities for participation from male prospective but females sees that their main problem is lack of training (21.1%), as they don't have previous experience or their households don't approve of their willingness to participate because of social upbringing cultural facades.

Then second in line for males was lack of training with 20.3%, but both males and females agreed that the problem of unemployment is one important obstacle (20.2%).

Obstacles to participation in NGOs:

- The decrease in number of youth managed NGOs, as the number in Egypt doesn't exceed 20 from a total of 17000 NGO, the ratio doesn't differ in other Arab countries like: Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia.
- In a field study on 31 Arab NGO from Jordan, Bahrain, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt, the participation of youth in the board or managerial staff of those entities didn't exceed 14.2% in Jordan while in Egypt it stood at 24.5%.
- There were varied percentages of youth roles in projects, 43.3% in suggesting projects, 76.5% on execution to make use of their energy and overcome unemployment even temporarily, 42.5% in follow up, and 50% in quality control.

Hence, we can conclude that:

- Arab youth is more involved in non-formal forms of participation than in formal forms, using the Internet, family issues, as they feel more liberated from cultural, political, and fear of participation constrains.

- It's noticed that as the circle of youth participation widens from the family to the local community to public political work on the societal level, the participation decreases. This is due to intertwined factors: knowledge about the candidates, safe participation, direct correlation to output, and youth ambition.
- One of the most important determinants in the issue of participation is Gender. In Arab society there are some perceptions that participation is male action, as families determine their girls' discourse within the community. That is why the position of females towards participation is more inclined towards social change, human rights, social justice and equality; while the males are driven more towards self-assurance.
- Youth has knowledge and will to participate but there are gender and social circumstances hindering them.

As there are legislations that determine a certain age limit for issuing voting cards and running for elections, in addition to elderly dominance and direction in different institutions (family, school, college, NGOs) which demotivate them especially at the political level.

Youth need non-traditional patterns of participation liberated from taboos and constraints, this is why youth get involved in online scientific and political debates.

The unwillingness to participate specifically in the political arena is a result of youth knowledge about the patriarchal constraints on their way of thinking, acting and participating.

Elements of a supporting environment to participation:

These elements are determined through several magnitudes:

- It's hard to realistically separate the elements of a supporting environment, as they are inter-dependant.
- A supporting environment is one of partnership between all parties involved in the lives of youth (family/education/ skills/ rights of citizenship) and allowing true opportunities through NGOs.

Elements of supporting environment:

Role of the family:

- Parent's realization of the necessity to delegate roles to off-spring in different stages of their social and psychological evolution with no gender bias.
- Equating between genders in roles and opportunities.
- Giving a chance to the child to gain knowledge, converse and to self expression.
- Change parent's attitude towards youth passivity through awareness of rights and duties.
- Arab families are the cornerstone of their children's culture, so they can promote the concept of "participation".
- Developing negotiation skills within values of respect and dialogue between parents and children.
- Encouraging parent's interaction with children peers without intruding their space.
- Reinforcing youth confidence and individuality through all life stages.
- Reiterating on the relation between family institutions and Civil society organization.
- Involving parents in planning for society development.

Role of Educational institutions:

- Availability of skills training
- Giving opportunities to practice hobbies and summer activities.
- Making use of universities activities in reinforcing human rights, gender equality and mutual respect.
- Offering freedom of expression in political and social issues through student unions.
- Developing curricula and linking it to modern technology, and associating public life to schools.
- Pushing the values of participation.
- Change the negative images of the workers in educational institutions towards youth.
- Adoption of effective training techniques to develop scientific and critical thinking in students.

Role of NGOs:

- Merge youth in managing NGO in planning, proposing, follow up, and quality control.
- Respect of the volunteer and boosting his self esteem without considering him cheap labor.
- Presenting financial incentives to volunteers and offering them transportation and meals.
- Spreading the culture of volunteerism through Media, religious figures, educational curricula, and youth awareness.
- Giving special care to youth exchange programs, camps which are considered to be very appealing to volunteers.
- Diversify training programs to escalate youth skills in their field of specialist or interests.
- Establishing an effective online volunteer network, to link prospect volunteers to NGOs.
- Breaking the psychological barrier between project managers and volunteers to create an encouraging environment to productivity.
- Creating small groups of volunteers to be the nuclei of many local development projects, to find an outlet to exploit youth free time.

