



Arab Declaration on Youth Empowerment

**We, Arab kings and presidents, call for youth empowerment and active participation in the society by contributing to the economic, social, cultural and political development.
(Khartoum Summit 2006) .**

BACKGROUND

The Declaration is a major activity of the project of "Empowerment and Participation of Youth in Population and Development Strategies" implemented jointly by the Population Policy and Migration Department/Social Division of the League of Arab States and the United Nations Fund for Population.

The idea of a visionary document on youth empowerment emerged in the workshop on "Arab Youth Participation in Empowerment Policies" organized by the Population Policy and Migration Department in the period 28-30 March 2005. In June, a workshop was organized with the participation of experts and representatives of Arab, regional and international organizations and a number of Arab youth to prepare the framework, concept and methodology of the declaration. Then, a committee of experts was formed to prepare the first project of the declaration, which was discussed through a number of meetings and workshops attended by decision makers, officials, Arab parliamentarians, representatives of regional, international and Arab organizations, representatives of youth organizations, in addition to number of Arab youth leaders and concerned experts.

It includes: -

- Meeting of the heads of councils and national committees in Arab countries (Tunis 27-29 September 2005), with the participation of heads and officials from the population councils from 16 Arab countries, in addition to a cluster of experts and youth leaders from Arab countries.
- Several workshops with youth leaders and officials from youth organizations in Arab countries.
- A number of meetings for the expert committee of the Declaration to develop and revise the project document.
- Meeting for the representatives of Arab regional and international organizations working in the region (Cairo, 14-15 November, 2005) to discuss and review in details the project of the Declaration.
- High level meeting to discuss and approve the project of the Declaration, attended by a number of ministers and officials from Youth department in different ministries and Arab parliamentarians from different Arab countries (5-6 February, 2006). In this meeting, the project of the Declaration was discussed and approved. Also, it was recommended to be presented to the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States, then to the Arab Summit in its 18th session in Khartoum (held on March 2006).

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- Declaration of the First Youth Forum for Information and Communication Technology, Cairo 2004.
- Declaration of the 5th Arab Parliament Meeting on Population, Development and Reproductive Health for Youth, Damascus 2004.
- Arab Charter for Human Rights approved by the Arab summit, Tunis 2004.

INTERNATIONAL AND ARAB REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN DISCUSSING AND REVISING OF THE DECLARATION

- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- International Labor Organizations (ILO)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations for Development and Population UNDP
- Save the Children
- UNAIDS
- Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO)
- Center for Arab Women Training and Research CAWATAR
- Arab Scout Organization

INTRODUCTION

We, Arab kings and presidents, call for youth empowerment and active participation in the society by contributing to the economic, social, cultural and political development (Khartoum Summit 2006).

- Arab nation, as a region and as individual countries, witnesses an important phase of its modern and contemporary history portraying unprecedented external and internal challenges. The decline of economic growth rates in some countries, external pressures, conflicts, and internal wars impact the present and future of youth. Therefore, the summit of Arab kings and presidents in Agiers 2005 stressed the need for a comprehensive reform at the political, economic and social levels. For the reform to attain its aspired goals, it should be inspired by our culture and civilization, and interact positively with global variables in light of our historic, social and political development.
- The Arab nation possesses potentials and opportunities supporting the distinguished civilization and achieving aspired reforms, sustaining and maintaining development. But as much as we possess spiritual, human and financial potentials and opportunities as much as we face obstacles and challenges at the regional and international levels, resulting from the strong competition triggered by globalization and rapid changes in information, knowledge and technology and the unequal development between north and south in general.
- The current demographic shift witnessed by almost Arab countries --in different degrees-- is characterized by the emergence of youth as a social and developmental force on the one hand, and the complicity of their issues on the other. The current Arab youth generation outnumbers any other generation, reaching the stage of maturity and production in a world full of rapid changes. The future of their nation as well as their future is influenced, positively or negatively, by their educational, health, economic and political status and the support provided by the family, community, and government. Comparatively speaking, this generation is the most educated with regards to the highest numbers of schooling, the number of those attaining high university degrees. Also, it is the best generation in health characteristics such as the life expectancy at birth. Also, it has a cultural diversity within the Arab region, in addition to knowledge of different cultures given the spread of satellite and internet. Also, this generation is it is the most willing to participate, recruit knowledge, and contribute positively to investment, savings and production.
- The demographic window resulting from the demographic shift provides once --in-- its-history human potentials. Hence, it is important to prepare youth from all aspects including health, education, skills and values and offer them real opportunities to enable their participation in development like the Asian tigers. In the Arab world, youth today and in the future represent unique opportunities. Thus, investing in youth is a guaranteed investment generating renewed resources that ensure national and regional sustainable development, and contribute to increase the rate of economic growth and poverty.
- These positive characteristics are coupled with unprecedented dangers threatening youth. The globalization's impact on efficiency and competitiveness creates the issue of the education quality and its appropriateness for the global job market, which become a genuine target for education to achieve. The growth of education at a rate higher than that of job opportunities raises the issue of the unemployment of uneducated. Consequently, the delay in youth self dependence, their economic independence and the formation of family. Although preventive medicine and treatment witness relative improvement, there are many emergent epidemic diseases such as the sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS. Also, the cultural interaction resulting from satellite and internet, and easy traveling create risks and challenges to the identity of youth in addition to others risks including poverty, marginalization, immigration, drugs, new forms of extremisms and violence. These issues are mainly exclusively affecting youth.
- Although the positive characteristics of the Arab youth resulted in successful developmental policies, including those related to children, there is a need to review, assess, and renew these policies to deal with new facts and global changes.

- This entails serious action plan for the next period to enhance youth capabilities and opportunities in the fields of health, reproductive health and rights, education and training, employment and unemployment, participation, and gender gap. The action plan should be grounded on the Arab youth right in education, health, and employment. Also, it should be implemented through a participatory approach including all concerned parties: government, civil society institutions, Arab private sector, regional and international institutions in addition to the effective participation of family to deal positively with the new facts resulted from the global development with all its risks, challenges and opportunities.

CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES

The Arab declaration targets young people - both males and females- in the 15-29 age bracket from all social, economic and cultural levels including those with special needs.

Empowerment is a process of forming, developing and recruiting youth capabilities to generate and distribute life opportunities based on youth rights and equal opportunities especially between male and females. This process sets youth free determination, broadens their choices and initiatives to include them in various fields. The essence of **participation** is a positive contribution in decision making to determine the type and level of possible and desired life opportunities for youth and their communities in the economic, social, political, cultural and political fields at all levels including family, state institutions and civil society institutions.

The Declaration is keen to ensure an enabling environment for Arab youth to enjoy their rights and duties of citizenship in addition to their human rights as to become productive, participative, creative and proactive, effective in the present and future of their own countries and region.

The Declaration adopts youth approach to enable the effective participation of youth, identify the principles and prospects of their empowerment based on a dynamic concept on empowerment that develops youth skills and widens their choices.

MAIN PRINCIPLES

Because the Arab youth is a main actor and partner in the present and the future of the Arab development, guard of the Arab civilization and the most capable of Maintaining it sophisticated and influential in the human civilization, responsible for the support of social and political stability which essential for the cohesion of the Arabs and continuing the development.

Keening to promote the basic human rights of young people overall sense, both the political and civil rights, economic and social rights as a fundamental criterion in the selection and formulation of policies and programs to youth empowerment, follow-up and evaluation.

In order to prepare young people for achieving their future, the declaration of the Arab youth empowerment based on the following principles:

- 1- Young People, an essential partner in both national and regional development, and the formulation of the desired future for the Arab Region.
- 2- The Youth have the right in good health, upgrading their reproductive health, exercise their reproductive rights, protection from sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS. The right to get high quality education, Decent gainful employment, and the right to participate as a priority to their empowerment, development and allegiance.
- 3- Earlier empowerment of children and adolescents, as it affects their abilities, characteristics and supporting them in the youth stage.
- 4- Critical Confrontation to the gender gap between youth. And to ensure the human rights of young people (Males and females), and assist justice benefited from the proceeds of development.

10. Confirming the importance of leisure time and cultural and artistic activities among youth as means to develop their spiritual, intellectual and physical capacities by creating youth clubs and entertaining centers.

Sectoral Common Fields

1. Supporting family by providing financial resources, knowledge and skills as it constitute the main pillar for youth empowerment. Thus, family has to ensure good education for youth, provide them with necessary health care and train them on important values such as equality and equal opportunity, dialogue, participation and respect of the other.
2. Fostering the role of media institutions and communication with the public in producing media messages that create an enabling environment for youth empowerment and provide opportunities for their participation in preparing media programs and their contents to express their needs and aspirations.
3. Intensifying cultural and advocacy programs for governmental and non governmental parties and parents to raise their awareness about youth issues.
4. Supporting research and studies on youth issues in different fields and stimulating governmental and non governmental organizations to incorporate youth issues in their policies and scientific interests.
5. Creating databases and updating indicators to assess achievements and trends of change in youth conditions and their empowerment and to find out challenges hindering the attainment of desired objectives.
6. Ensuring coordination among all parties concerned by youth issues including governmental and non governmental organizations and private sector to benefit from their contribution in youth empowerment. Coordinating programs and projects related to youth issues to ensure their effectiveness and complementarily and prevent duplication.
7. Following up and assessment of policies, programs and projects on youth empowerment to redress any deviation, and to ensure positive interaction with the latest developments imposed by the global changing world.
8. Enhancing the flow of fund and its sustainability, and the diversity of its origins to ensure the efficient qualitative and quantitative implementation of policies, programs and projects.
9. Deepening and expanding opportunities of cooperation and technical, human and financial support at the national, regional and international to support Arab youth empowerment.

Basic Mechanisms

- Considering the multiplicity of regional, international, Arab and national parties related to Arab youth empowerment and the need to activate their participation in executing the declaration, it is important that:-
1. Every national, regional and international institutions and organizations assume its responsibility and functions related to youth empowerment.
 2. The Social Division in the League of Arab States coordinates among different international and Arab parties to prepare an action regional plan to activate the provision of declaration on the principle and objectives of youth empowerment.
 3. Create the Arab Youth Observatory by the League Arab of States including databases and information, monitoring changes in youth conditions, and identifying obstacles, challenges, and risks facing youth.

10. Creating a groups of training policies and rehabilitative policies for the employment and support of the poor youth to take him out of the cycle of poverty, with special qualitative attention to poor youth females not to continue poverty between their children.
11. Enabling national, regional and international commitments to protect immigrant youth workers and ensuring the fulfillment of their human rights and social needs. Protecting youth from exploitation and providing opportunities for communication with their communities.
12. Boosting youth rights and meeting their needs, promoting their skills and capacities. Supporting youth -Males and females- in poor families and empowering them through education, good health services and continuous training.
13. Supporting scientific research and development, providing enabling environment to limit Arab brain drain especially young callbers, and stimulating the contribution of Arab immigrants in national and regional development.
14. Fostering national, regional and international efforts contributing to immigrants' rights, protecting young immigrants from all forms of exploitation, and providing outreach/communication opportunities with their communities.

Participation and Social Integration

1. Fostering youth participation in all national and international fields as an inherent right particularly their participation in decision making and their commitment towards national rights according to the principle of equal opportunity.
2. Supporting youth participation in designing plans, programs and projects related to youth issues through widening channels of communications with them to express their opinions and involve them in planning and implementation. Providing necessary information and skills to empower youth to participate and to lead new initiatives. Overcoming cultural obstacles that hinder girls participation, promoting volunteerism among youth in line with the development and dissemination of social and cultural volunteering values.
3. Committing to integrate strategies and policies related to youth empowerment in national and regional strategies and policies and providing opportunities for youth participation.
4. Enhancing knowledge and training on democratic practices and entrenching the culture of initiative and citizenship responsibility among youth, youth representation in legislative and decision making bodies, and expanding the participation of governmental and NGO organizations as avenue for youth social integration.
5. Encouraging youth to participate in the activities of civil society organizations and to create their NGOs in their local communities.
6. Exerting efforts to empower youth in areas suffering from armed conflicts through the provision of financial, political, health, physiological, educational and security needs, integrating them in the society by supporting youth refugees rights and providing integrated care services in reception centers.
7. Focusing on marginalized illiterate youth, unemployed and street children through developing programs and fund for their participation in the society.
8. Providing special attention to handicapped by developing policies and programs to preserve their rights and ensure their rehabilitation, their social integration and self dependency, make use of their energies and overcome all obstacles hindering their practice of citizenship rights.
9. Providing activities and psychological, social and vocational rehabilitation programs to youth, reintegrating arrested and criminal youth -Males and females- in the society, and providing education and employment opportunities to them.

- 5- Commitment of policies and programs in all categories of young people without any discrimination, males and females, rural and urban, Handicapped, marginalized and exposed to dangerous behaviors.
- 6- The Youth have the right in express their vision, needs and aspirations and available platforms and channels of communication and dialogue with the generations, enabling the parties concerned, especially through the media.
- 7- The Youth have the right in participate in all forms of participation, especially political participation, participate in Civil Society Organizations and expand youth options thereon, and to foster a culture of participation, volunteerism and initiatives.
- 8- Creating job opportunities for young people and seeking for link the needs of an Arab labor markets and educational and training policies to cope with unemployment and poverty among Youth .
Family and Civil Society organizations are essential partners in the preparation and Empowerment of young people .

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The global economy has become the dominant factor for the quality and level of life opportunities for Arab youth; it imposes new criteria for required skills and capabilities (education and training), new forms of its utilization. (Employment and forms of participation) in addition to rewards (level of income and in-kind revenues). Global economy imposes challenges and provides opportunities in health development and participation. Since the international dominating civilization imposes its criteria and perquisites in each era, so it is appropriate that the Arab civilization encompassing huge historic heritage would inspire forms, criteria, values and tools to improve work, participation and consumption. In this regard, the major task is to find out a set of integrated and interactive packages to create an enabling environment for youth empowerment based on good choice, freedom of participation and participation in favor of Arab youth. These packages are policies on health, reproductive health and rights, education and training, employment, income distribution, participation taking into account its variables and patterns. These policies should be activated as follows:

Health, Reproductive Health and Rights

1. Advancing health development for youth-both males and females by preventing health problems and diseases, creating safe and supporting health environments, providing information, building capacities, providing improved qualitative and quantitative health services based on the principle of "Health for All" including consultation, family participation, peers groups, schools, health providers, media, civil society institutions benefiting from the competitive advantages of each party.
2. Fighting against cured diseases, presenting from chronic diseases, physiological diseases, preparing the adequate environment (financially, culturally and socially) enabling youth to participate in planning programs of basic health care, building the institutional and human capacities to meet the health needs of youth.
3. Considering the sexually transmitted diseases especially AIDS, by intensifying opportunities for awareness and prevention, providing psychological support and care, providing opportunity of treatment for patients confidentially and privacy.
4. Providing necessary, efficient, and high quality reproductive health services for each age bracket including childhood, adolescents and youth while guaranteeing the rights of each age, ensuring broad dissemination of knowledge and information to be obtained equally by youth - both Males and females.
5. Providing opportunities to youth about the legitimate, safe, effective and cheap means to learn about reproductive health and rights especially those related to their rights of family formation according to their choice.

- 6- Creating reliable database to develop policies on reproductive health and supporting youth reproductive rights.
- 7- Disseminating the culture for reproductive health including its sexual, cultural and social aspects through all the media and incorporated it in educational curricula.
- 8- Enhancing human activities in fighting against of landmines and all forms of explosives and raise the awareness about its dangers in affected countries especially among children and youth.
- 9- Taking appropriate measures to face all forms of violence and harm against youth especially all forms of violence against girls and providing integrated treatment to victims to re-integrate them in the society and secure their rights.
- 10- Creating adequate hygienic environment in local communities especially in poor urban and rural areas (slums), which entails the provision of potable water and sewage networks, disposition of waste solid management and environment pollution, and securing a renewed and hygienic environment.
- 11- Intensity regional and international cooperation in the provision of health rescue assistance for youth in case of natural disasters, wars, conflicts and other emergencies.
- 12- Formulate strategies to face the phenomenon of drugs among youth through the prohibition of drugs and its trafficking. Also, it is important to expand the participation of youth and youth organizations in formulating and implementing these strategies. The concerned strategies should focus on raising awareness about drugs, in addition to preventive and curative measures for addiction treatment along with the rehabilitation and reintegration of patients.
- 13- Expand the opportunity of sport among youth (Males and females), eliminate all barriers of participation in sports, guaranteeing distribution equity, empower youth through education, creativity and self expression through cultural, physical and sportive activities which benefit spiritual, physical, health, intellectual and psychological development.

Education and Training

- 1- Fighting illiteracy with all its forms: cultural, political and informational among youth (Males and females), which will contribute in preparing enlightened, productive and active youth.
- 2- Directing curricula and pedagogical methods towards democratizing the structure and organization of education process, the development of scientific and critical thinking, liberal education, self education, team work, in addition to the development of skills to find alternative to problems along with the development of quality and creativity.
- 3- Focusing educational policies – in addition to religious, cultural and media institutions - on enhancing youth awareness among the rights and duties of citizenship and social participation and productivity and to link education with all the aspects of life and focus on acquiring life skills.
- 4- Ensuring high quality education for youth (Males and females) particularly in poor areas and providing untraditional educational opportunities to who did not get education in order to bridge the educational and knowledge gap.
- 5- Fostering understanding and critical thinking in basic education, fighting the phenomenon of school dropouts, enabling the principle of "Secondary Education for All," expanding opportunities for high education (universities), promoting open education and long distance learning to face the increased number of youth and provide continuous educational opportunities.
- 6- Reforming all educational institutions, ensuring continuous training and formation for all concerned parties in the education process taking into account the requirements of sustainable development and latest developments on knowledge, information and technology.

- 7- Increasing investment in training to ensure the development of youth skills and its responsiveness to the needs of job market, providing training in all fields with special focus on job training and the field of new technology.
- 8- Facilitate equal and comprehensive training opportunities in the field of information communication, introduce media and information influencing youth knowledge, trends, value and behaviors.
- 9- Incorporating knowledge, information on curricula, and educational activities. Knowledge and information should be promoting family life especially the aspects of youth reproductive health and rights, prevention of bad and harmful practices for the health of Males and females.
- 10- Devoting attention to sport, cultural and entertaining activities among youth –Males and females- in educational institutions, and fostering outreach at the local, regional and international levels.
- 11- Supporting student unions to empower and activate their role and responsibilities, and providing adequate environment for students wider participation notably in preparing and implementing policies and educational programs and school and student life.
- 12- Adopting policies to empower youth living in difficult conditions and those unable to continue their education by enhancing their opportunities in continuous training.

Employment, Income and Poverty Policies

- 1- Expanding investment opportunities and creating productive projects in the industrial fields to exceed the demand on young manpower, investing in the fields of knowledge, information technology and distant training on job skills.
- 2- Develop legislations and policies to achieve the most important objective, which is the complete employment for youth and ensuring equal opportunities for youth males and females to obtain a stable job, income generating and adequate to the capabilities and ambitions of youth.
- 3- Prepare equal social ground for youth and adult to improve their work conditions and maintaining their rights in work, wages, income, listening to their voices through work institutions and labor organizations to be established in the future.
- 4- Foster equality in job opportunities for young females by different means including issuing and adopting laws to face gender discrimination in job market in addition to legislations to ensure the right of youth (Males and females) on equal wages based on equal efforts and values.
- 5- Active integrated partnership among governmental institutions and private sector –informal and formal- and among initiatives taken by civil society to promote youth employment.
- 6- Providing the necessary support to carry out research, studies and the creation of databases on youth employment, particularly those concerned with labor market and demand trends for labor, for designing and implementing the policies and programs related to the preparation of young people skills, informational and cognitive for labor market.
- 7- encouraging investment on developing the capabilities of young (Males and females) opportunity in self-operating, starting private projects, providing them with the necessary skills and resources for establishing the projects, community commitment to marketing their products, and promote youth directly to the projects in rural areas.
- 8- Strengthening commitment to securing ban forms and disposal of child labor, and take measures to protect young people from other forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation through sex tourism, prostitution, trafficking in human beings and slavery, and deal with the negative effects of these practices on the development of mental, physical, social or moral, with regard to the situation of female in particular.
- 9- Developing mechanisms to provide consultation youth on careers, through educational and training institutions, as well as through local Society's governmental and Non-governmental organizations.