Education Justice in the Middle East and North Africa

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A Scoping Study of Education Contexts in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria

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            Clay workers' neighborhood, Cairo, Egypt. 2007.

Foreword

The Open Society Foundations Education Support Program and Arab Regional Office originally undertook this research in 2009 as part of an initial scoping study for internal consideration. The objective was to begin to understand how our mission of education justice resonated in this complex, diverse region. We wanted to understand how we could help frame an ongoing discourse of education as the social justice of opportunity among the many other groups working to improve the quality of education for the increasingly young, disillusioned, and displaced population of the Middle East and North Africa.

During the course of this research and our internal discussions about the role that a private foundation could feasibly and appropriately play, we witnessed the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt unfold, and the deep effects they had on other countries in the region. Inspiring young people led the revolts and, rather than retreating and leaving the business of governing to the experienced, continued to participate in defining the order that they hoped would follow the upheavals. Some of the revolutions remain incomplete. Others are struggling to institutionalize their hard-won reforms. It is a time of nervousness and of hope throughout the region as new governments and societies catch up to the changes wrought largely through the energy and commitment of emboldened and energized youth.

If the gains from these uprisings are to be institutionalized, education systems throughout the region must also change. They must operate on the values of participation, equity, and free thinking embodied in the political revolutions of the region. Despite some improvements in the region in enrollment figures and test scores, the education systems' structure and content remain rooted in the old values of memorization and respect for authority. They remain strikingly unequal, as the privileged have access to elite private schools while the majority study in deteriorating government schools.

The schools that existed before the revolutions are the same schools that have just begun a new academic year. The sweeping political changes in the region must reach into these education institutions not only via the thoughts and actions of animated youths but also structurally and systematically. The challenges of training teachers to develop critical thinking skills in their students, the disparities in access to quality education, and the specter of increasing privatization exacerbating those disparities are largely the same today as they were in November, 2009, yet the opportunity for making real and lasting systemic change is unprecedented, urgent and critical. This new openness and dynamism is as fragile as it is likely to be short-lived; it must be seized and made to count.

The Open Society Foundations decided to release this report now to highlight the continuing challenges facing education systems in the MENA region and also because this is the time to think and act differently in education. It is vital that reforms and investments in education do not get lost in a sea of other pressing concerns as new governments and governance mechanisms take shape. This is the moment to bring the values of the revolution to the next generation so that they are equipped to build and participate in open, prosperous societies.

Education Support Program
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Contents

1. Executive Summary

This scoping study of education contexts in the Middle East and North Africa was carried out for the Open Society Foundations' Education Support Program to inform the development of its "education justice" strategy in the region. The Open Society Foundations defines education justice as "an equal chance for every child and an equal chance for every adult," a potentially powerful concept in a region affected by prolonged conflict and significant political, social and economic tensions. The countries selected for the study include Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. While these countries do not give a fully representative picture, they do provide useful insights into some of the key issues and priorities around education in the MENA region.

This report is intended as a broad situational analysis of education contexts in these countries rather than an in-depth study of specific issues. Prior discussions with Open Society Foundations staff in London and Amman steered the researchers toward a dual emphasis on, firstly, exploring the range of inequalities that exist in primary and secondary education across the region and, secondly, the role of civil society in shaping the processes of educational change.

The report draws on information collected through some 80 interviews conducted with a range of stakeholders in each country, including senior staff in government, NGOs, universities, and international agencies. The interviews were carried out between August and October 2009 around the same set of questions relating to access, quality, public/private provision, the role of education in society, and the role of civil society in education reform. Although the emphasis of the semi-structured interviews varied with each stakeholder, this resulted in a useful comparative approach across the selected countries.

While the majority of the interviews were carried out with civil society organizations, where possible we have included the views of government and other education providers in each country context. The study stresses the importance of supporting

the state institutions responsible for education development, as well as the input of civil society into policy processes. This is accompanied by an analysis of the varying levels of political space in each country, relatively weak traditions of advocacy across the region, and the inherent (though shifting) power relations between government and non-government actors in all contexts.

A review of both published and unpublished literature in English and Arabic was carried out, with a particular focus on inequalities in education and the role of civil society in education development. It was found that these areas are relatively under-researched in the MENA region and that literature on education development tends to be dominated by reports by international development agencies. Most influential among these is the World Bank, which focuses predominantly on the potential role and current limitations of education as a driver of economic development in the region.

This report highlights that a contextually specific approach is vital to developing an effective organizational strategy that can address the various political, social, economic and administrative factors that are both driving and impeding inclusive access to quality education in the Middle East and North Africa. The study concludes that Open Society Foundations' framework of "education justice" offers a very relevant approach to understanding and addressing key education priorities in the MENA context, and in particular the countries included in this study.

In Egypt, wide regional disparities exist, with Upper Egypt being particularly disadvantaged. On the one hand, these inequalities are accompanied by the increasing role of private education. On the other hand, there is a pervading fear that the growing number of free-of-charge religious schools is promoting division and religious fundamentalism in the society. Working and disabled children are still largely excluded from education.

In Jordan, enormous efforts have been put into education reforms, but the quality of education is still deemed to be relatively low. Persisting inequality between the general and vocational streams at secondary level exists alongside poor-quality education, violence in schools and high drop-out rates. There is also a lack of debate around civic education and concepts related to citizenship. Certain groups of children, including working children, street children and children with disabilities, are still excluded from the education system.

Lebanon has witnessed the degradation of its public education system since the Lebanese civil war. At primary school level, the majority of Lebanese children

(close to 60 percent) now attend private school and the growth of private education along religious lines has worrying implications for reinforcing existing divisions and latent conflict within Lebanese society. Questions of citizenship and reconciliation are highly relevant to the education context in Lebanon. There is particular discrimination against refugees and other "non-citizens" in education, impacting long-term Palestinian and Iraqi refugees as well as a growing population of migrant workers. Disabled children are excluded from mainstream education, and concepts of inclusive education tend to be weak at the government level, though they are growing in strength within civil society.

The Palestinian education system continues to operate in the context of long-term military occupation, blockade, internal political strife, and violent conflict. The challenges range from limited school materials in the Gaza Strip, due to the blockade, to raising education quality in the face of declining indicators across the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. National strategies are in place for improving education quality and teacher development, but these are being implemented only in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. There are education inequalities between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and these gaps are only set to widen, with negative consequences for Gaza's children and young people as well as the wider society. Disabled children are also under-supported, though they are included in the national strategy on paper. While the first Palestinian national curriculum introduced in the late 1990s had a significant focus on civic education, this element has increasingly diminished in recent years.

In Syria, the focus is on modernization through improving the quality of education and student skills. Yet there are widening regional disparities, with the northeast particularly marginalized. Despite government and NGO efforts, disabled children are still excluded from education and there is a very narrow understanding of inclusive education. Effective inclusion since 2003 of large numbers of Iraqi refugee children and the forced Arabization of Kurdish children are other key themes in the Syrian education context.

Given the specificities and sensitivities of the different country contexts in this region, generalizations are to be avoided. Nevertheless, five cross-regional themes have emerged from the country-specific analyses and these are discussed in the concluding section of this report. These are followed by a number of regional recommendations for Open Society Foundations to consider in the development of its "education justice" strategy in the Middle East and North Africa.

1.1 Five Cross-regional Themes

The report's focus on several countries revealed five themes that are found across the region:

- *Barriers to teaching and thinking critically*
  "Critical thinking" is still a difficult concept in the countries included in this study, not least because it implies democratic principles, which are far from entrenched in the wider society. The lack of progress in teaching methods is also affecting standards at the higher education level. Frequently, students entering university are not equipped to read critically, debate issues, or carry out independent research. The issue of "consuming knowledge" as opposed to "producing knowledge" emerged during the interviews in different countries.

- *Inequalities in education and society*
  There are stark inequalities in all the education systems included in this study. These inequalities in education can be linked broadly to disability, religion/ethnicity, wealth, region/location, and gender, although they are clearly interactive and strongly reinforce broader socio-economic inequalities in the societies in which these national systems operate.

- *Impacts of privatization in education*
  In a number of countries in this study, particularly Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, increasing privatization in the education sector is playing a prominent role in widening inequalities in access to quality education. Political instability and neo-liberal economic agendas have conspired to undermine the public school system in a number of countries. In Lebanon, for example, it is already the case that, according to one interviewee, "only poor children go to public schools."

- *Politics of education in conflict*
  While normal provision of education is disrupted by conflict, education becomes fundamental in reconciliation processes and transitioning to a more just and equitable society. In countries affected by conflict, "national narratives" in education become particularly controversial in subjects such as history, geography, civic education and even literature. These questions are often ignored because they are considered "too difficult," or "too political," yet they were repeatedly raised by civil society organizations during the interviews for this study.

- *Citizenship, activism and the state*
  Concepts of citizenship, and by extension citizenship education, are very sensitive. Civic education is traditionally understood as "national education" and is primarily about making students "good" and "loyal" citizens of the state. Yet there is scope for a more far-reaching and transformative role for citizenship education through tackling questions of equity and inclusion in wider society, and encouraging critical thinking. Civil society organizations are already playing an increasing role in schools, as well as non-formal learning settings, to counter more exclusive notions of citizenship and national monolithic narratives.

The regional recommendations arising from this study are included at the end of the report.

2. Introduction

The concept of "education justice" as defined by the Open Society Foundations is "an equal chance for every child and an equal chance for every adult." Particularly in the context of the Middle East, a region affected by prolonged conflict and deep political, social, and economic tensions, this concept has the potential to be very powerful. In contrast with a rather narrow, technical understanding of the role of education in relation to economic growth, "education justice" facilitates a stronger focus on the pressing issues of inequality and discrimination in education in the Middle East, which are key to wider societal divisions.

Indeed, the role of education in promoting non-discrimination and inclusive citizenship could hardly be more critical. Nationalist, secularist and religious narratives are competing alongside calls for education reform and social and political change, often in complex political and conflict-affected contexts. There is also a persistent linkage between limited degrees of political and democratic space and the slow movement toward developing participatory teaching methods and promotion of critical thinking. "Education justice" has the potential to offer a frame of analysis, which can support existing movements for educational change.

This scoping study of education contexts in the Middle East and North Africa was carried out for the Open Society Foundations' Education Support Program to inform the potential development of its "education justice" strategy in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The parameters set by Open Society Foundations for this study were relatively broad, and as such it constitutes a scoping study of education contexts in the region rather than an in-depth analysis of specific issues. However, prior discussions with Open Society Foundations staff in London and Amman steered the researchers toward a twin emphasis on exploring the range of inequalities that exist in primary and secondary education across the region, and the role of civil society in shaping the processes of educational change. Neither early childhood education nor tertiary educa-

tion was a focus of the study, though they are touched on in some sections. A list of questions was agreed on to guide the research: these related to access and inclusion; quality; the role of private education; the role of education in society; and processes of education reform.

It is the contention of this report that a contextually specific approach is vital to developing an effective organizational strategy that can address the various political, social, economic and administrative factors that are both driving and impeding inclusive access to quality education in the region. After identifying key gaps in the literature and outlining the methodology of the study, this report was structured to capture this country-specific research and analysis. Each country section introduces the national education system in that context, before moving on to identifying and discussing country-specific themes emerging from the study.

Given the specificities and sensitivities of the different country contexts in this region, generalizations are to be avoided. Nevertheless, five cross-regional themes have emerged from the country-specific analyses and these are discussed in the concluding section of this report:

- Barriers to teaching and thinking critically;

- Inequalities in education and society;

- Impacts of privatization in education;

- Politics of education in conflict;

- Citizenship, activism and the state.

The report ends with regional recommendations for the development of Open Society Foundations' "education justice" strategy in the Middle East and North Africa (see Section 10.3).

3. Methodology

This report seeks to communicate current views and debates in the region in relation to education inequalities and the role of civil society in shaping education reform. In addition to a review of published and unpublished literature in English and Arabic, the authors conducted in-depth interviews in September and October 2009 with a range of stakeholders across the region, including researchers, policymakers and practitioners. Among these were government officials, senior staff in UN agencies and other international organizations, local and international NGOs, independent researchers, and academics based in university education departments.

While the emphasis was on interviews with civil society organizations, where possible, we have included the views of government and other education providers in each country context. The study stresses the importance of supporting the state institutions responsible for education development as well as the input of civil society into policy processes. This focus is accompanied by an analysis of the varying levels of political space at the time of writing in each country and the shifting power relations between government and non-government actors in all contexts.

3.1 Interviews with Key Stakeholders

During the course of this study, the researchers identified key education stakeholders in each country and conducted semi-structured interviews and discussions with them. In total, over 80 interviews were undertaken across the five countries. The guiding questions agreed with Open Society Foundations staff shaped each interview, although the flow of discussion was flexible, to allow different emphases according to the expertise and interests of the interviewees.

Interviews were carried out in Arabic or English. In some countries, the political environment places certain limitations on what people feel prepared to discuss openly

and on the record, and for this reason we did not record the interviews. However, in order to bring out the range of voices included in this study, we have used quotations in the report based on reconstructed notes. For reasons of confidentiality and security, interviewees' names have not been disclosed.

Our role as consultant researchers for the Open Society Foundations impacted how we were perceived by governments, NGOs and other actors. The limited time spent in each country (approximately one week) meant that relationships and trust could not easily be established where they did not previously exist. In Egypt and Syria we did not manage to set up meetings with government ministries, despite our efforts to do so. In Palestine, due to the Israeli-imposed restrictions on entering the Gaza Strip, it was not possible to conduct any meetings there, so the discussion of Palestinian education is largely reliant on West Bank sources. We have tried to be transparent about these limitations in the analysis.

3.2 Data Analysis

The insights from the stakeholder interviews underpin much of the analysis and recommendations contained in this report. We have taken care to reflect different perspectives and highlight areas of particular contention, triangulating assertions where possible by cross-checking with other interviewees as well as information contained in the literature. However, the views expressed by the various interviewees should not be taken as "fact" but rather as important insights into the perceptions and priorities of different actors working in the field of education within their specific contexts.

While we took a deliberately country-specific approach to ensure that the findings were adequately contextualized, once all country sections had been completed, we were able to jointly review and discuss the different issues that were emerging, and identify common themes. This cross-regional analysis resulted in the five thematic conclusions of the report.

4. Gaps in the Literature: Education Inequalities and the Role of Civil Society in the Region

Despite lively debates on education at the national level across the MENA region, we found relatively few cross-regional studies, and even country-specific literature was somewhat limited in terms of analysis of education inequalities and the role of civil society in shaping education reform. While there has been a great deal of education research in the region, beginning in the 1960s, as many Arab states rapidly began to expand their education systems, recent literature tends to be dominated by reports from international development agencies.

The role of civil society in education development across the region is particularly under-researched. In Andre Mazawi's appraisal of research trends,[1] he is concerned by the lack of attention to the role of civil society and the contestations and power struggles that take place in the processes of education development in the Arab states. Mazawi contends that education research in the region "refers mainly to the dominant role of state institutions and policies and their function as modernizers and/or reformers, and it underestimates the effects of civil society on educational outcomes."[2]

The international literature available on education in the MENA region has significantly increased over the last decade, in large part due to global education priorities introduced through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) framework, but also due to the often media-driven, non-evidence-based commentary on education in Arab countries in the context of the so-called "war on terror."[3]

The most influential strand in the international literature, however, has been around the role of education in promoting economic growth and democratic processes. The World Bank's regional *Strategy Towards Learning and Development*[4] in 1999 was particularly important, and in 2008 was followed up by an evaluation of education development in the region, called *The Road Not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa.*[5]

In this report, the World Bank presents the analysis that despite impressive achievements in increasing enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Arab states since the 1960s, and near gender parity in basic education, education in the MENA region is still lagging behind other economically comparable regions such as South America. In particular, adult literacy remains low in some countries, "and education systems do not produce the skills needed in an increasingly competitive world."[6] In short, relatively high levels of public investment in education by Arab states (higher than in other comparable regions) are not seeing adequate returns in terms of economic growth.[7]

However, the World Bank's approach to education has been critiqued, for example by Swift,[8] who summarizes its underlying analysis as "Engineering" + "Incentives" + "Public accountability" = "Successful Education Reform." Such a framework is seen to facilitate the development of a quasi-market system of education wherein increasing competitiveness and parental choice will pave the way to improvements in the quality and relevance of education, to meet the pressing new challenges of a global economy. There is concern that short-route accountability (schools as providers of a service and parents as clients) will simply reinforce the inequalities that already exist in education, a concern that is certainly relevant in a number of the countries in this study, most notably Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. Reflecting this sentiment, UNESCO's *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009* recommends "recognizing the limits to choice and competition," arguing that

> The development of quasi-markets in education and the rapid emergence of low-fee private providers are not resolving underlying problems in access, equity or quality. While many actors have a role to play in education provision, there is no substitute for a properly financed and effectively managed state education system, especially at primary level.[9]

Furthermore, the focus on the relationship between education and economic growth overlooks other important roles for education, which is a significant oversight

in a region affected by acute social and political tensions. For example, as this study will highlight, education urgently needs to address rather than reinforce wider societal divisions in the MENA region, by promoting concepts of diversity and inclusive citizenship through mainstream education. Given that international governments are pouring billions of dollars of aid into conflict-affected countries like Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, it is somewhat perplexing that the 2008 report does not take these issues into account, especially considering the World Bank's many contributions to thinking around the role of education in conflict in recent years.[10]

The Road Not Travelled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa highlights that increasing investments in education in the MENA region have failed to translate into wider economic development. There are very clear challenges for education in these countries, where enrollment tends to be high but the education provided is often of weak or declining in quality.[11] To some extent, this reflects a more global picture of major inequalities in access to quality education, despite rapid progress in enrollment in line with global development goals. But as UNESCO's 2009 *Global Monitoring Report* makes clear, the current imperative for improving education quality goes hand in hand with tackling broader inequalities, power relations and governance structures in wider society.[12]

Finally, while there might be an overall regional trend, there are quite different reasons for stagnant economic growth and rising unemployment within each country context, and education is only part of the picture.[13] If we are to effectively address the question "What might have prevented education from producing better development results over the last three decades?"[14] then statistical analysis needs to be contextualized in relation to the varied social, economic, and political developments in the region, including conflicts and political instability in some countries. The recent global economic crisis is also significant, and according to some studies, both health and education services in the MENA region already show some indication of being subject to cuts.[15]

5. Egypt: Increasing Community Participation and Persisting Exclusion in Education

5.1 Introduction and Background to Education in Egypt

Egypt has the largest education system of the countries included in this study, and it is estimated that 18 million students attend public schools. According to the Constitution and to the Child Law passed in 1996 and modified in 2008,[16] education should be provided free of charge at all levels—basic, secondary and tertiary. Although the government has tried to guarantee this right for its citizens, during the interviews it was often mentioned that many public schools charge low to considerable fees per year and/or for the cost of books or other items.

The public school system is comprised of nine years of basic education divided into a primary level (from grade 1 to grade 6) and a lower secondary level (from grade 7 to grade 9). Before the primary level there are two years of pre-primary education and after the lower secondary level there are three years of secondary school. After that, students can enroll in tertiary education. The public system is divided into "regular" schools and "experimental" schools. Whilst in regular schools the curriculum is taught completely in Arabic, in experimental schools the curriculum is taught partially in English (science and math), with the introduction of French at a later stage. Experimental schools bear this name because they started off as pilot projects, and, although the "experimental phase" has evolved into a more structured one, they have retained this name. Recently, a new kind of school has been introduced: "future schools" impose a restriction on who can enroll in them, because both parents need to

speak a foreign language.[17] Although experimental and future schools should be free of charge, as they are public schools, they nevertheless charge yearly fees.

5.2 Is Public Education Really Free?

Many of the interviewees revealed that in spite of the right to free and basic education in Egypt, public schools can still be extremely costly for families. Not only do they need to pay yearly fees and sometimes buy books, but they also have to cover the cost of private supplementary tutoring. The poor quality of education in the public sector, low teachers' wages and financial incentives have led to a flourishing "private lessons business." In Egypt, as in other Arab countries included in this study, private tutoring can take the form of one-to-one private lessons or small group lessons, but it is also becoming progressively more institutionalized. Private centers offer additional private tutoring for students in the afternoon, and, increasingly, public schools are offering afternoon tutoring, with teachers giving private lessons (either one-to-one or in small groups) for lower fees than supplementary tutors. Public-school private lessons are promoted by the government to prevent the widespread use of private one-to-one tutoring.[18] Mark Bray[19] points out that one third of students in Egypt report receiving regular private supplementary tutoring. He also suggests that while some forms of private tutoring can have positive effects, tutoring provided by teachers who teach the same students in the morning has generally negative outcomes. Although some authors interpret private tutoring as an act of agency on the part of both teachers and students to try to counteract the rigidity and restrictions of the system and obtain social mobility,[20] other authors note the negative side of the phenomenon and its link to the education system:

> The inflexible static curricula, rigid examination practices, heavily bureaucratic school administration, and constant inspections, all reflect the authoritarianism of school governance. Despite this seeming airtight system, teachers manage to realize their private goals by successfully pursuing the enterprise of private lessons. Thus, teachers are able to accomplish a double role in the social organization of education: they support social authoritarian trends while looking after their personal interests. In this way, teachers resolve the harsh reality of financial impotence.[21]

Those students who cannot afford private tutoring are generally disadvantaged in comparison to their peers who can afford them; they risk failing exams and are most probably at risk of dropping out in the long term. Furthermore, the principle that education should be provided free of charge is, in practice, seriously undermined.

5.3 Fragmentation and Inequality in the Education Sector

Public–Private Divide

There was a widespread perception amongst interviewees that public schools are of low quality. It is largely recognized that the Egyptian system, in striving to establish an infrastructure that can reach as many children as possible, has been unable to maintain the quality of education in the process.[22] Some private schools, by contrast, are considered to be of very high quality. Among these are the international schools, which teach a completely foreign curriculum in English, French or German. Although all schools, whether public or private, should teach an approved Egyptian curriculum, often, as far as international schools are concerned, what is checked is only that these schools teach Arabic and religion a couple of times a week.[23] While students graduating from international schools do not acquire any information on the history of their country, for example, and sometimes can barely write in Arabic, they seem to be particularly advantaged in progressing to university and the labor market afterwards.[24]

While these schools are considered to be at the top end of the private sector, there is a considerable range in terms of quality and price within the private sector. At the middle level are the so-called language schools, which teach almost all the curriculum in English, and have a better school infrastructure and better paid teachers, in comparison with regular public schools. Although cheaper than the international schools, these schools are affordable only for middle-class families, and even for those who can meet the expense, there seems to be great competition to enroll, given the few places available.[25] A UNESCO report dated 2008[26] records that 7 percent of students are enrolled in the private sector, mainly in the capital and other urban areas of the country. Although a relatively small percentage, 7 percent of students in a large system such as the Egyptian one represents a significant number of students in absolute terms. Furthermore, this removes from the public system those parents who might otherwise have fought for improvements to the quality of public school education on offer.

Secular–Religious Divide

Within the public sector, a significant division exists between the secular stream (almost all the public schools) and the Islamic Al-Azhar system. The latter was established to teach the Islamic religion and cultivate the study of the Arabic language. More recently, schools affiliated to the Azhar University have been recognized as completely equivalent to those in the secular stream, and students can fulfill their compulsory basic education in these schools.[27] Al-Azhar schools are supervised by the Supreme Council of the Al-Azhar Institution and are formally independent from the Ministry of Education (MoE).[28] Enrollment in the Al-Azhar system reached 18 percent in 2005/2006,[29] an increase of 5 percent in comparison to the previous four years.

Although all schools are officially bound to teach the national state-approved curriculum, Al-Azhar schools have a particular focus on religion and the Arabic language, and they admit only Muslim students. While the quality of these schools does not seem to be a major issue, a greater concern is their focus on religion and Arabic language. These schools seem to fill a gap between expensive private schools, where it is felt that students are losing their national and religious identity, and the secular public schools,[30] where many also feel that religion is not sufficiently addressed.[31] At the same time, however, there are fears that the Al-Azhar schools are fuelling intolerance and segregation between different groups in society, as well as increasing religious fundamentalism.

A second debate within the public sector relates to secularist-Islamic education and Muslim—Coptic relations,[32] although religious differences are often downplayed to engender feelings of national identity and unity. Nevertheless, during the interviews, it was reported that Christian Egyptians (Copts) seem to be disadvantaged in comparison to their Muslim peers within society at large and in terms of representation in the government.[33] Their role in the make-up of Egyptian society is largely underplayed in the history curriculum and not addressed in the civic education wherein an imagined Egyptian identity conceals a much greater diversity in reality. For example, a senior researcher maintains that:

> Even the language used in Arabic textbooks is extracted only from the Qur'an, contributing to the marginalization of other sources of cultural heritage in Egypt and the linguistic and other contributions of different religious groups in society.[34]

Urban–Rural Divide

Egypt is a vast country, with the majority of the population concentrated in the urban areas and along the Nile River. Poverty is concentrated in the suburbs of the big cities, and predominantly in the rural areas of Upper Egypt (in the south), where more than 50 percent of the country's poor live.[35] Poor living conditions represent a major issue, and the gap in education access between the poor and the non-poor is reported to be larger than the gender gap.[36] In 1940, the Upper Egypt Association for Education and Development (AUEED) established 120 schools, ranging from one-classroom schools to fully developed schools, to provide education in areas in Upper Egypt where government provision had not reached previously, or had reached only very recently. These were later reduced to 35 schools, with new laws and regulations emanating from successive governments.[37] At the moment, AUEED manages 35 primary schools, of which 3 have lower secondary level classes.[38] AUEED's mission is to provide good-quality education to the poor. Up to 2004, they provided education free of charge, but now impose a fee to cover schools' recurrent costs and accreditation fees. On the one hand, in 2004, AUEDD raised teachers' basic salary by 50 percent and employees' salary by 30 percent. On the other hand, the accreditation to the National Association for Quality and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) requires AUEED to carry out self and external assessments as well as infrastructure improvements, which have forced the association to request money from students.

5.4 Literacy and Education Quality

The most recent national data shows an overall adult literacy rate of 66 percent[39] while the sizeable illiterate sections of the population tend to be "poor, rural, largely adult women."[40] Although this may be true for many countries in the world, illiteracy rates among adult women in Egypt reach a worrying level of 42 percent, and until 2009 less than half of poor rural women between the ages of 17 and 22 had completed four years of basic education.[41] The government has, however, put a lot of emphasis on trying to "eradicate illiteracy."[42] In 1990, the National Campaign for Literacy and Adult Education (NCLAE) was launched and followed by several further plans. A national curriculum was developed including not only literacy and numeracy skills but also life skills and human rights. In taking an inclusive approach, partnerships with private and civil society organizations were also sought. For example, Caritas-Egypt has been

promoting literacy in urban and rural areas since its establishment in 1967. Adopting an approach based on Paulo Freire's pedagogy, they provide basic education to adults who, lacking any literacy skills, often become "the poorest of the poor" and live in highly disadvantaged areas. Although using its own approach and textbooks, Caritas adopts the national standard basic course of nine months followed by a three-month post-literacy course. They provide not only literacy and numeracy courses but also health and environmental awareness, human rights and basic life skills.[43] They have also established "Village Libraries" in the areas where they work, on the basis that literate environments are vital to sustain newly literate communities and stop them from relapsing into illiteracy.

Although Egypt has made considerable progress in overcoming illiteracy, mainly through the expansion of access to basic education, persistent levels of illiteracy remain strongly related to issues of quality education. A recurrent theme during the interviews was that children in public schools are overloaded with unnecessary information, while teachers neglect the basics of education, such as reading and writing, and life skills. National and international organizations alike hold the view that the quality of education in the public sector is poor. In spite of the efforts of the government and the numerous reform projects, the low quality of education often results in children completing the cycle of primary education without being able to read and write. Some argue that the MoE does not want to acknowledge this problem and it is for this reason that the ministry does not always want to participate in international tests and/or publish test results.[44] In 2004, Egypt participated in the TIMSS for grade 8 and scored 406 in math and 421 in science, compared to international averages of 467 and 474, respectively.[45] Numbers are a sensitive issue in the country. The government sometimes obscures the crisis by emphasizing improvements to school infrastructure, not education quality.

Those who complete a literacy course can, in theory, enroll in lower secondary education and complete their education if they wish. In practice, however, because of the lack of nearby schools in the most disadvantaged areas and the negative social attitudes toward adults returning to school, it is quite rare for adults to complete their formal education after attending a literacy course.

5.5　Exclusion of Vulnerable Children in Education

Street and Working Children

There seems to be a high prevalence of street children[46] in Egypt, although their number is disputed: whilst UNICEF gives a range from 100,000 to 1 million, the Diakonia organization gives an estimated number of between 100,000 and 200,000.[47] The government has made considerable efforts to try to tackle issues related to street and working children through the establishment of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in 1996. NCCM is responsible for policy making, development and monitoring issues related to child protection. It played a significant role in amending Child Law 12/1996 to Child Law 196/2008, especially for the chapter regarding criminal treatment of children "vulnerable to deliquency."[48] A hotline was also established under the NCCM with the legal provision of Law No. 126, to play an important role in helping to prevent children from suffering violence and abuse and to increase the likelihood of perpetrators of violence being brought to justice. NCCM has authority over all other ministries involved in issues relating to childhood and, in theory, can legally bind them to observe the national laws on child protection.

Civil society development practitioners are, however, critical of the legal framework within which they work, while reaching out to and providing services to street children is a task principally left to civil society organizations. For example, an NGO providing education and other activities to street children is the Hope Village Society (HVS). With the support of the government and other international partners, HVS aims to provide a range of services and opportunities for street children, as well as increasingly focus on advocacy for the rights of these children. They also run literacy courses in partnership with the National Department for Literacy and Adult Education, which provides books, teachers, technical assistance and training items for their workshops.[49] But as the director of an international NGO working in Egypt stated:

> Street children have no formal recognition by the government. We lack a proper policy for street children, who very often do not have identity cards and thus become completely invisible children.[50]

Egypt is defined by the World Bank as a low middle-income country.[51] Although not a poor country, it is estimated that in 2004, 14 million people could not ensure their basic food and non-food needs,[52] and it is in this context that there are relatively high numbers of working children in Egypt. The International Labor Organization

(ILO) has been working with NCCM at the legal and policy levels,[53] and has also introduced an education initiative in collaboration with UNICEF, to create education opportunities for working children. The "one-classroom school" model started off as a way of catering for girls' education in rural areas (still its main aim) and has been adopted for working children. One-classroom schools are made up of only one classroom, where students of different grades are taught together in a multi-grade teaching environment. This model aims to provide education to children who need to work, offering flexible school/class hours and trying as far as possible to adapt to children's needs. These schools are recognized by the MoE, thereby providing a real opportunity for working children to attend school.[54] Unfortunately, they extend only to primary level, so students completing their courses face the same problem of not being able to fit into mainstream education in the longer term.

Other initiatives have also been developed over the years to cater for working children. For example, in the early eighties, Laila Iskandar opened a school to cater for children making a living out of recycling garbage (the so-called *zabbaleen*), with flexible class attendance and a curriculum relevant to the lives and environment of the children, including a "learning and earning project."[55] However, such initiatives are small-scaled, and there is no such flexibility to accommodate working children in the mainstream system.

Violence in Schools

Violence in schools emerged as another major issue in the interviews, closely related to the quality of education in the public sector and drop-out rates. A 1998 study[56] highlights that a substantial percentage of boys (80 percent) and girls (61 percent) experience physical punishment in school. It also highlights that punishment is often related to student behavior and to their poor achievement in academic tasks.[57] The Egyptian Center for Human Rights Education (ECHRE) identifies seven factors contributing to violence in schools:

- Reliance on rote memorization as the only means to deliver classroom instruction;

- A lack of any central inspection of local schools and educational systems;

- Teachers' willingness to use violence to control classroom behavior;

- Teachers who experienced violence in schools see violence as part of a normal learning environment;

- Teachers are forced to teach a large number of different subjects in overcrowded classrooms (typically 50 or more in a class), and are required to teach 25 classes or more in a normal week as well as having to lead non-academic activities in their free time;

- A lack of extracurricular activities (clubs, student government, sports, drama, etc.);

- Assignment of excessive homework because classes do not provide sufficient time to complete the required work.[58]

A number of organizations, including MediaHouse, Diakonia and Save the Children (UK), are starting to work on issues related to violence in schools, mainly through the circulation of films that report and condemn the use of violence in schools. They also advocate the replication of positive initiatives such as the New School Program (under the umbrella of the MoE), where pedagogical approaches such as student-centered and active learning have reduced the level of violence in schools. An important study carried out by Yousef Wahbi and Majdi Samouil also made a valuable contribution by reporting the voices of children in defining the meaning of violence for them and describing how they experience it.[59]

Girls Education and Community Schools

At first glance there appears to be good gender parity in school enrollment in Egypt. In 2004/2005, the overall Gender Parity Index (GPI) was 0.99 for primary education and 0.992 for pre-primary education.[60] However, in many remote areas, especially in Upper Egypt, no school services were provided until recently. This combined with traditional attitudes toward girls' education has resulted in high levels of illiteracy amongst women.

As discussed in relation to efforts to provide education opportunities to working children, since 1992, a successful initiative to help cater for girls' education in rural and remote areas has been promoted by UNICEF (with funds from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)), called community schools (also known as one-classroom schools). In these schools, active learning is promoted and teachers are not necessarily graduate teachers but trained facilitators with the aim of fostering democratic learning environments. The MoE provides textbooks and learning materials as well as teachers' salaries, thus providing each child with everything necessary for him or her to learn, and ensuring that the schools are fully free of charge. Com-

munity schools aim to provide "quality education for all," whilst ensuring the sustainability of the projects through the ownership and participation of local communities in the management of the school. A UNESCO report on community schools in Egypt[61] enthusiastically refers to their role as "social movements" promoting change and far-reaching educational reforms. In particular, it highlights that

> the school greatly emphasizes the importance of agricultural work and encourages students to feel proud of the communities to which they belong. A sense of community is established in and out of school and students are encouraged to participate in solving the problems of their own communities. This is where citizenship begins.[62]

Community schools also provide parenting education concerning child health, hygiene, and nutrition. Moreover, each committee in each community school decides what school hours to adopt, trying to respond in particular to girls' and their families' needs. In spite of the flexibility of school hours, multi-grade teaching, and the adoption of an active learning pedagogy, these schools are not within the non-formal sector but are part of the formal system, and students sit for the official national exams taken at the end of the primary cycle and can receive the officially recognized certificate. While the aim of UNICEF is to gradually hand the model over to the MoE to scale up, there are also fears that once enlarged, the model will not be as successful as it is now.[63]

5.6 Exclusion of Children with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties

The National Education Strategy[64] highlights the current situation of children with disabilities, the lack of data about them, and the extent to which they have access to quality education, in line with Law No. 126,[65] which aims to ensure the rights of disabled children to education and vocational training in mainstream schools and institutes. Although there are an estimated 2 million children with disabilities in the country, the National Strategic Plan[66] can realistically only target 10 percent of them. Access to education for disabled children thus presents a gloomy picture in Egypt. The MoE admits that only a limited number of children, not more than a few hundred, are benefiting from various pilot projects and are effectively included in mainstream

education. Other children attend the 804 special centers in the country, while the majority remains excluded from education. Infrastructure inaccessibility, negative traditional thinking, inadequate teacher training and inadequate support for children with disabilities are deemed the main reasons for such exclusion.[67]

Plan International is working in Egypt to raise awareness around issues related to children with disabilities and is advocating for their right to quality education. Nationally, the Association for Health and Environment Development (AHED) has been active in spreading information about disability issues and advocating for inclusive education.[68] A senior education expert in a UN agency reported that, in particular, the lack of data on disabled children is hampering any effort to reach out to them.[69] While this holds true for many countries, where disabled children become "invisible children," some argued that only NGOs and civil society organizations have the will and capacity to reach out to disabled children.[70] But even some NGOs seem reluctant to integrate disabled children into their mainstream classes for fear that they might lower the overall level of achievement.[71]

Education for Palestinian Refugees and Other Minority Groups

In Egypt, the number of Palestinian refugees ranges between 50,000 and 70,000.[72] During Gamal Abdel Nasser's government, refugees had the same rights as Egyptian nationals, and this continued until 1978, when the Palestinian faction lead by Abu Nidal killed the Egyptian Minister of Culture, Yusuf Al-Siba'i. Following the Camp David agreement of the same year and the subsequent peace process with Israel, Palestinian refugees' conditions in Egypt increasingly worsened. Laws rescinding their rights to free education, employment and residency were issued after 1978 and Palestinian refugees started to be considered as "foreigners."[73]

Many Palestinian children are denied basic education because they do not have residency permits or they are not legally registered. The *manazil* system—home-based education—is an alternative for families who cannot afford the fees for public schools. Literacy courses offered by mosques or other non-profit entities are another alternative.[74] In this way, at the end of the compulsory cycle of primary schooling, children can sit for the government exam and get a recognized certificate. Those who manage to make their way to university level face major problems, though. While public universities are free for Egyptian students, Palestinian refugees need to pay fees in foreign currency. This, combined with the poor economic conditions of many families who are not legally allowed to work, is a significant cause of drop-out. Many Palestinian students report their wish to complete basic education and then vocational

training, to be able to work straight away and earn a living for themselves and their families.[75]

Furthermore, while Palestinian refugees receive support from UNRWA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, the agency cannot operate in Egypt. The reason for this has historical roots: in 1950, King Faruk did not allow UNRWA to extend its mandate to Egypt, with the result that favorable conditions for the Palestinians to remain did not develop. Currently, UNRWA in Egypt has only a representative function.

5.7 Civic and Human Rights Education in School

In 1981, under President Hosni Mubarak, history, geography and civic education textbooks appeared under the name of "Social Studies". The MoE defines civic education as the subject "that forms the skills and abilities of students, enabling them to take a vital part in social and political life, creating civilians believing in the values of society, democracy and freedom".[76]

In 2006 a Cabinet committee formed under the President's directives to set the strategy for civic education issued a report that included the ruling National Democratic Party vision for implementing citizenship programs. Baraka,[77] reporting the findings of a focus group with teachers, school headmasters, and curricula designers, records a high level of diversity in understandings of civic education and suggests that values related to civic education on paper may not be easily translated into practice, given the political context in which teachers have to teach. A researcher in a government research center suggested that the concept of citizenship is not easily translated in the Egyptian culture, and that civic education as it is currently taught is "only a subject of indoctrination."[78]

The EU has been working on issues related to human rights and democratic reforms, promoting the role of civil society organizations. AUEED, for example, has started civic education in its schools as part of an EU program. They promote rights awareness for children and try to foster democratic and tolerant values in children.[79] UNDP[80] has also been working on a program to promote human rights awareness in society, working with the judiciary system, police, teachers and NGO staff. They are also advocating the introduction of a more significant space dedicated to human rights in the curriculum, because they believe that what is currently present in the curriculum is only a minimal part of the much broader scope and meaning of human

rights. This is in line with Baraka's content analysis of civic education textbooks, which reveal only a superficial mention of children's and women's rights. He also reports that citizenship does not include the duties of the citizens toward their communities, and that while dependence on government provision of goods and services is over-emphasized, private initiative is ignored. Furthermore, he points out that civic education does not address political participation, nor mention current issues such as the Israeli—Palestinian conflict, the war in Iraq or the events of September 11, 2001, thus detaching the curriculum from reality.[81]

5.8 Opportunities and Challenges for Education Reform

Government

Education reform in Egypt is a process that started over 30 years ago, and, theoretically at least, there is considerable political will behind it. Educational policies and plans tend to be set up centrally, although the power to appoint staff and evaluate schools' needs is decentralized to educational directorates. The objective of the National Center for Education Research and Development (NCERD) is to conduct education research to inform the national educational strategies developed by the MoE, although it seems that research findings do not necessarily influence education strategies.[82] Furthermore, one interviewee argued that, unlike 20 years ago, there is now a lack of independent research on education due to the difficulties in challenging official discourses, and this negatively impacts on education and equity.[83]

Civil Society Organizations

In comparison to other countries in the region, civil society in Egypt has a very active role in the field of education. Civil society organizations have been providing basic education in geographical areas not covered by the government (AUEED, for example) and in developing successful approaches to adult literacy (Caritas, for example). They generally have strong partnerships with the government, which often consults them for their expertise. The NCCM, for instance, established strong networks with civil society organizations to draw upon their experience of working with street children. There is also a civil society unit within the MoE, and civil society organizations are legally entitled to enter schools, although they tend to provide extracurricular activities.

A new law passed in 2003 gives civil society organizations more freedom in comparison to the previous law, but major restrictions remain. Islamist threats have exacerbated the government's suspicion of civil society organizations, which have been put under tighter control. Civil society organizations need to be licensed by the government and undergo controls concerning their funding, board members, and activities. Nevertheless, they still enjoy considerable freedom of movement compared to civil society organizations in other countries of the region. It is also worth noting that during the interviews, stakeholders seemed comfortable expressing critiques of the government and educational policies, while the most sensitive issue seemed to run along the religious divide between Muslim and Christian Egyptians.

International Organizations and Donors

After the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, Egypt became an important player in the US—Middle East peace process strategy. In the eighties, the government allocated little for education, which was mainly financed through US aid assistance. In the nineties, when the importance of investing in education was recognized, the government had to admit serious deficiencies in the school system and had to target most funds on developing infrastructure. Only recently has the focus been shifted to the quality of education, although school infrastructure remains a problem.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank are heavily involved in influencing educational policies and strategies and in financing their implementation. USAID is implementing the Education Reform Program (ERP), advocating for school-based management and stronger community participation to take over the centralized role of the state. Some senior educationalists, however, maintain that whilst USAID reforms bring in key innovations, they do not adequately take into consideration the cultural and political aspects of education.[84]

UNICEF is a strong partner of the government and has been working within education and community schools for more than 16 years. CIDA is also involved in education reform, although they are now phasing out their education programs in Egypt. Finally, the European Union has been financing an Education Enhancement Program with €100 million to improve the quality of basic education and progress toward the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE).

6. Jordan: Reforms and Challenges to Education Quality

6.1 Introduction and Background to Education in Jordan

As Jordan is a relatively small country, poor in natural resources and industries, education has long been one of the top priorities of the Jordanian government. An often-heard phrase is that Jordan's richness lies in its human capital. Accordingly, between 1995 and 2005, Jordan invested on average 6.5 percent of its GDP and 20 percent of its overall budget in education, thus becoming one of the Arab states with the highest rate of public expenditure on education in the region, after Tunisia and the OPT.[85] Education is valued as the means to a well-trained workforce on the one hand, and loyal and democratic citizens on the other hand. The establishment of a knowledge-based society and knowledge-based economy are the key pillars of the education vision promoted by the MoE and King Abdullah II, and are the basis of ongoing education reform.

The National Education System

The national education system is comprised of two years of pre-primary education and ten years of compulsory basic education, followed by two years of secondary education. Secondary education can follow either an academic or a vocational stream. At the end of the secondary level, students sit for the Tawjihi examination, the general secondary school leaving exam. Based on the grade obtained in this exam, students can pursue either courses requiring high grades for university entrance, such as Medicine

and Engineering, or courses requiring lower grades for university entrance, such as English Literature or Education. A rigorous streaming system divides students according to academic performance and grades: "This exam decides for your whole future ... this only exam in 12 years of learning," reports one interviewee.[86] Progression to secondary education remains a problem in Jordan. Although rates of enrollment in basic education are high and Universal Primary Education (UPE) has been achieved, and in spite of the high value conferred on education by Jordanians, six people out of ten do not have secondary education.[87]

Those who graduate from the vocational track at the secondary level can pursue further education at community colleges or at university only if they sit an examination in additional subjects (at the end of the vocational track, students gain a general certificate rather than the Tawjihi certificate; this general certificate does not allow them to directly enroll at university).

Education Reforms and the Knowledge Economy

Education reform has long been a concern for Jordan, which, in 1988, started a Comprehensive Education Development Plan. In 2002, the MoE organized a forum to discuss the Future of Education in Jordan. Participants included a wide range of professionals and experts from the public, private, and civil society sectors. After the forum, the government of Jordan entered into negotiations with the World Bank and shortly thereafter, the Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy (ERfKE) was initiated. ERfKE constitutes a major education reform funded by several organizations (for a total of $380 million) and includes the reform of all aspects of education. ErfKE has four main aims:

1. to re-orient education policy objectives and strategies through governance and administrative reforms;

2. to transform education programs and practices for the knowledge economy;

3. to support the provision of good-quality physical learning environments;

4. to promote readiness for learning through early childhood care and education, enhancing equity through the public provision of the second year of Kindergarten (KG II) in the low-income areas of Jordan.

The reforms included a restructuring of the MoE, enhancement of the Management of Information Stream (MIS) and elaboration of its curriculum, improvements in business and IT education in secondary schools, the promotion of early childhood

education and care and the physical improvement of school buildings. ERfKE evaluation studies were carried out by the National Center for Human Resources Development (NCHDR), which was founded in 1988 to support the Comprehensive Education Development Plan for human resources. Although the NCHDR evaluation reports were generally positive about the impact of ERfKE, some studies highlighted that the main challenges faced were related to lack of experience and training by teachers for the implementation of the new curriculum, and difficulty in adopting new approaches and modalities of assessment. However, some interviewees expressed deeper concerns about the success of ERfKE and its effectiveness in delivering the goals set in 2003 and in tackling issues of quality education, effective curricula reforms, MoE restructuring and staff training.[88]

When interviews were conducted in October 2009, a second phase of ERfKE was soon due to start and would have been developed over five years (2009—2014). It broadly covered the same areas as what has since become "ERfKE I," with five main components:

1. Field directorate and school-based development;

2. Policy, planning and organizational change (governance);

3. Improvement of teaching and learning resources development;

4. Expansion of ECCE, improvement of vocational education and special education;

5. Improvement of the quality of education facilities.

6.2 Public–Private Divide and Public–Private Partnerships

In Jordan, the private provision of education is relatively high. The 2008 World Bank report[89] records the percentage of private education provision at nearly 30 percent in the year 2003 for basic education and at 16.6 percent for secondary education in the same year. At the pre-school stage, private provision is predominant, with 77 percent of all children attending private kindergartens and 18 percent attending NGO-provided kindergartens.[90] Private education is a relatively new phenomenon in Jordan, and although it has a perceived higher quality, the interviewees reported that recently, many families have transferred their children from private to public education.[91] This mirrors a similar trend in Lebanon and Egypt, which seems to have been caused pri-

marily by the recent economic crisis and also, in Jordan in particular, by the transfer of Iraqi refugees from private to public schools, once they were allowed to enroll in government schools.

Private schools are generally established by individuals, companies and charitable institutions. They adopt a curriculum which is negotiated with the MoE and are supervised by the Department of Private Education at the MoE. In schools that deliver the national curriculum, students sit for the national examinations, whereas in schools with their own curriculum, students sit for a different (often international) examination. Whether private schools provide better quality education than public schools is a subject of debate. While for some interviewees it was evident that private schools have better infrastructures and better language teachers, and give more attention to individual students and their families, others think that the perceived better quality of private schools is only measured through students' achievement, which is higher than in public schools, rather than through other indicators of quality education. Higher student achievement in the private sector can be related to several factors. On the one hand, some suggest that private schools tend to recruit the best students, providing scholarships for those who have merit but no ability to pay; on the other hand, high grades are given more easily than in public schools because families are paying for their children's education, and teachers and head teachers are not willing to lose their students because of poor academic performance.[92]

Public–Private Partnerships: Madrasati

In Jordan, the **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study** (TIMSS) scores are quite high if compared to those of other countries in the region (and this was praised by many during the interviews). Nevertheless, a few interviewees admitted that—in spite of government investment and continuous reforms—the quality of education in the public sector is low and constrained by lack of resources, facilities and equipment, high teacher—student ratios, violence and the pervading double-shift system.[93] Surveys conducted by the MoE in 2002 reveal that many public schools are unsafe and overcrowded. Although 70 percent of schools adopt a double-shift system, this does not adequately address the problem of overcrowded classrooms exacerbated by the recent economic crisis and the shift of 35,000 children from private to public schools.[94] Infrastructures remain a problem, with over 75 percent of schools situated in rented buildings and a lack of appropriate learning resources.[95] High drop-out rates, especially among children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, are an indication of the exclusive nature of education in the public sector.

To overcome issues related to the quality of education in public schools, in April 2008 Queen Rania, in collaboration with the MoE, launched an initiative known as Madrasati (My school). On the Madrasati website, the words of the Queen describe the aims and vision of the initiative:

> ... it is about repairing and restoring schools to make them safer, brighter, better equipped, and more inspiring learning environments. I hope that individuals and organizations from all sectors will join *Madrasati* and help us rejuvenate our children's schools. Education is a social responsibility: by working together, and forming strong partnerships, we can create lasting change for all our children ...[96]

Madrasati is a broad coalition of partners and funding organizations with two main aims: improving the school infrastructure and environment and promoting more active, student-centered learning. To achieve these aims, school committees are formed to include students, parents, teachers, civil society organizations, and representatives of the private sector (who generally fund the initiative). The committee then plans what is needed to make each school a better and safer place and then coordinates with national-level plans. Civil society organizations have an important role in the schools within this program, and promote initiatives to improve child safety at school, better learning environments, and healthier students. Madrasati is a remarkable model of public—private partnership, but it is difficult to say to what extent it could be easily replicated without the presence of such a strong catalyst as the Queen

6.3 Exclusion of Children with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties

Responsibility for disability issues falls with both the MoE and the Ministry of Social Development. Whilst the first is responsible for education, the latter is responsible for services and special needs institutes. In 1993, Law No. 12, the first on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, was issued. It included the right of people with disabilities to social integration, education and rehabilitation. It also established the National Council for the Care of the Disabled at ministerial level. Jordan was one of the first Arab countries to sign, in 2006, and ratify, in 2007, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2007, Law No. 31 on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities was passed. It ensured the right to education and higher education for every child with disability within both the public and the private sectors. The law also established the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, an independent governmental organ headed by Prince Raad Bin Zeid and in charge of all aspects related to persons with disabilities. In accordance with Article 4.1 of the CRPD, the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities developed a national strategy for disability and was put in charge of its follow-up and implementation. The National Strategy was launched in 2007 for 2007—2015, in collaboration with UNESCO and the MoE. It covers aspects of disability such as prevention, care and rehabilitation, education and employment, sports and recreation, social protection, family empowerment, and access to buildings. In October 2009, the first National Conference on Disability was held to evaluate the first two years of the strategy, to set the next action plan, analyze the current situation of persons with disabilities, evaluate the services provided so far, and determine how to better integrate the role of civil society organizations within the work for the disabled.[97]

As far as education is concerned, the National Strategy for Disability has the following objectives:

- Total inclusion in mainstream schools of children with learning disabilities, with the provision of resource rooms. At the moment, there are 565 resource rooms and special education teachers. These rooms are equipped with computers, whiteboards, and learning resources;

- Inclusion of children with physical disabilities;

- Integration of children with hearing impairment and mental disabilities: they have special classes within mainstream schools but they do not follow the same curriculum as their peers;

- Special education in separate institutions for children with speech impairment (up to the sixth grade, after which they are integrated into regular education);

- Special provision in separate institutions for children with sight impairment (up to the sixth grade, after which they are integrated into regular schools). They follow the national curriculum with the support of material translated into Braille.

There is also a special secondary school for children with hearing impairment who do not wish to be integrated into regular schools.[98] In July 2009, the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities set accreditation standards for institutions and programs for persons with disabilities in Jordan, thus developing a

system for monitoring and supervising the quality and relevance of the education and services provided to the disabled.[99]

Despite national policies to include disabled children in regular schools, the interviewees reported that disabled children are still excluded from education and often also from other social services that the state should guarantee. A culture of charity and pity with regard to disabled children is still widespread, even within civil society organizations that provide services for disabled people. This often leads to disabled people being kept dependent on their service providers rather than being empowered and "liberated." One international organization is tackling this situation, and social stigmas associated with disability, by working to integrate disabled children into mainstream schooling and through enabling disabled children to express their needs, ideas, and personal stories in their own words.[100] However, they maintain that even for physically disabled children, integration into schools is very difficult due to the layout of buildings and access difficulties, especially to toilet facilities.[101]

Furthermore, it is important to look at the post-education phase and understand the job opportunities available to children who graduate from school. The employment of persons with special needs is still not adequate and the legislation dealing with disabled people's employment needs to be activated. This was one of the aims of the Employment-Technical and Vocational Education and Training (E-TVET) reform, which was launched at the time of this report's interviews.[102]

Children Dropping out of School and Non-Formal Education

The 2008 World Bank study reports a drop-out rate of 0.2 percent for primary education in the year 2003. By contrast, a study carried out by the National Council for Family Affairs, with the support of the World Bank, reports an average drop-out rate of 0.81 percent, which accounts for between 85,000 and 94,000 students a year. Considering a time span of 10 years, the report cogently argues that the number is considerable in a small country such as Jordan, where knowledge and investment in education are so highly valued.[103] In a UNICEF study dated 2002, academic failure is reported to be one of the primary reasons for drop-out, combined with family poverty and the need to work.[104] Drop-out seems to be most prevalent from grades 3 to 4, when the learning cycle changes, and again around grade 7. Those children who drop out of school for social and economic reasons are doubly disadvantaged because by missing out on education they miss perhaps their only chance to escape from poverty. They also become "invisible" to the system,[105] and are consequently more likely to become objects of work exploitation and sometimes also abuse.

One of the organizations working to address the educational opportunities of working and street children defines their programs as non-formal education (NFE) and informal education. Their programs start from the children's own environment, drawing on philosophies such as Paulo Freire's pedagogy and Robert Chambers' framework for participatory development. Although defined as non-formal education, what the programs actually provide are accelerated courses for children who drop out of the formal system. At the end of the whole cycle, students can get an officially recognized certificate, and this is one of the most important achievements of this organization, conducted in collaboration with the MoE, which will eventually take over the initiative. The MoE, in fact, requests that, while the first phase can be carried out by civil society organizations, the other two cycles should be based in formal settings. They employ qualified public teachers who receive further training to become course "facilitators."

A Note on Gender Parity

The Gender Parity Index for primary education and secondary education is very high in Jordan, at all levels of education. Furthermore, girls generally seem to outperform boys and enroll in faculties that require high scores in the school leaving exam. This trend was deemed to be "dangerous" by one MoE official, who thought that if the majority of professions were taken up by women, this would weaken society. In reality, educated women tend not to participate in the labor market (only 13 percent of women enter into employment[106]), thus creating a gap between university graduates and the number of professionals available to work.

Near gender parity is registered also for Palestinian students. In this case, too, there seems to be discordance between women's potential and the opportunities open to them in the labor market (as well as the availability of space away from their families to allow them to exploit their potential).[107]

6.4 Education Provision for Refugees

Palestinian Refugees

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Iraqi Refugees

The Jordanian government estimated that, in March 2007, there were more than half a million Iraqis in the country.[112] Iraqi refugees predominantly live in urban areas of Amman, and because they cannot legally work, they rely heavily on income sources transferred from Iraq. In 2007, for the first time, Iraqi children were admitted to state-funded schools. UNHCR estimates that there are 250,000 Iraqi school-age children in Jordan, whilst Iraqi children enrolled in public schools account only for around 21,000 children. While the first influx of Iraqi refugees was primarily wealthy urban Iraqis who were able to enroll their children in private institutions, those who arrived in successive flights were from lower socio-economic backgrounds and less well educated. This, combined with not being allowed to work, poses serious threats to their ability to survive in Jordan and may explain the low number of children enrolled in public schools. The lack of accredited academic certificates of education levels attained in Iraq is another reason for this. Furthermore, a UNESCO official explained that in Jordan it is not possible for children to re-enter the formal system after they have been out of school for more than three years.[113] This policy was often applied to Iraqi children who, not allowed to attend public school and unable to attend private school, had been kept out of school for more than three years. Confusing announcements since 2005 on whether or not Iraqi children are permitted to attend or public schools have increasingly led parents not to enroll children in schools.[114]

A survey carried out in 2008[115] on those Iraqi children attending school reported that they face difficulties in understanding the Jordanian accent, in adapting to the curriculum and in feeling that the schools are safe places. Discrimination along religious divides is also reported, with Shi'a Iraqi children accused of being "unbelievers" and their families collaborators with the Americans.[116] More importantly, many children are reported to be working in order to financially sustain their families (many households are female-headed and therefore generally considered more vulnerable to

poverty). In Jordan, as much as in Syria, no additional support is provided to Iraqi refugees in schools. On the contrary, they are perceived as a burden on already strained resources and can be subject to discrimination by their Jordanian peers.[117]

6.5 Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a top priority for the Jordanian government. In a country increasingly oriented toward a knowledge economy, and in the belief that its main resource is human capital, the development of TVET is of primary importance. In Jordan, several actors are involved in the provision of TVET, such as the MoE, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR), the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), and Al-Balqa' Applied University (BAU). TVET is also provided at other levels of instruction. For those who have completed basic education, there is a comprehensive secondary education stream with both an academic and a vocational branch, with more than 40 specializations, or an applied secondary education stream that is mainly implemented by the VTC (apprenticeships in more than 50 specializations). Those who have completed secondary education can be trained at a "sub-professional" and intermediate occupational level in community colleges (CCs).

TVET provided at secondary level has a bad reputation amongst Jordanians, who hold university degrees in high esteem and tend to associate social stigma with low educational levels. There are several reasons for this: on the one hand, as indicated above, there is a widespread culture of human resources investment and human capital theory and therefore high value is attributed to education and degrees. On the other hand, TVET generally caters for those with lower academic performance, thus becoming associated with lower social status. "Students who go to community colleges are the poorest ones and those who do worst at school," one interviewee reported.[118] Especially among those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, TVET is so despised that rather than have their children enroll in it, families would prefer they go directly to work. "We did a study in Sahab [Irbid] and we found people who did not even want their children to think about vocational training," explains the deputy executive director of a high-profile Jordanian NGO.[119] TVET is associated with a sense of academic failure and the idea that what is taught there can be learned more easily during practical job apprentices.[120]

Community colleges—the intermediate level of TVET after students have completed secondary education—are currently under the supervision of the Balqa Univer-

sity (previously under the supervision of the MoE). The objective of the community colleges is to provide technical subjects to form a professional cadre at an intermediate level (technicians). An education specialist nevertheless argued that community colleges provide more behavioral sciences courses than technical ones, and that this, combined with the low quality of provision, leads to the widening of the gap between what is taught and what is needed in the labor market.[121]

The Ministry of Labor and the National Center for Human Resources Development (NCHRD) have over the last few years drafted a comprehensive E-TVET strategy[122] to make TVET more responsive to market needs, improve its general quality and increase women's participation: there are only a few specializations appealing to women, who record a high drop-out rate in the TVET sector.

6.6 Teacher Training and Quality of Education

In spite of the numerous education reforms, Jordan suffers from a low quality of education in the public sector. Adjustment policies in the nineties led the state to under-invest in tertiary education and professions such as that of teachers were greatly damaged by this lack of resources. Jordan has inherited various systems of teacher training, but recent moves have made teaching an all-graduate profession[123] whilst existing teachers who previously graduated from community colleges are being upgraded by MoE programs and public universities to obtain BA degrees. In Jordan, there are two main streams of teacher training programs: class teacher programs, for those who want to teach from the first to third grade of primary education, and field-teacher programs, for those who want to teach from the fourth grade to the tenth. The field-teacher system ceased after studies conducted by the NCHRD reported that future teachers need to master their subject rather than focus only on teaching methods and pedagogy. Therefore, the so-called "consecutive model" was introduced, according to which students are first prepared academically and then qualified to teach through an additional year of pedagogy. Currently, therefore, teachers have different qualifications: academic BAs, field-teacher BAs, and holders of academic BA degrees who have upgraded their community college degrees.

Interviewee's opinions on teachers' wages were contrasting: for some interviewees, teachers' salaries were adequate to Jordan living costs. An official at a governmental research center highlighted the fact that although basic salary at the beginning of the career may be low, teachers' salaries increase with progress in career and they

include extra bonuses and benefits such as pension schemes and interest-free loans. Other interviewees reflected on the fact that teaching in Jordan was no longer appealing for Jordanians, who actually preferred to teach abroad (especially in the Gulf countries), where they could get decent salaries. This seemed especially true for university teachers: "We are losing our best teachers who prefer to go to Saudi Arabia. There, they are paid much better than here."[124]

An ERfKE evaluation report[125] identifies teachers' lack of training and experience as one of the weaknesses of the reform. Although the evaluation refers in particular to the lack of training on the implementation of the newly introduced curricula, interviewees also pointed out the bad shape of teacher training in the country. For example, classrooms were provided with computers that teachers did not know how to use, and teachers were not trained on how to draw on ICT when teaching. One of the ERFKE I evaluations, not surprisingly, found that ICT resources were often not used during lessons. In other words, although ICT facilities exist, teachers keep delivering lessons in the same way they did before.

ErfKE II will address issues around teacher training through the creation of an education training center that will provide preparatory training for newly appointed teachers. It will also set up a system for the accreditation of teachers using national professional standards and refine the teachers' qualificationssystem.

In June 2009, in parallel with ERfKE I, Queen Rania launched the Queen Rania Teacher Academy in collaboration with the Columbia University Teachers College. The aim of the academy is to improve the quality of teacher education, to provide in- and pre-service training to newly appointed teachers, and to build school networks aimed at the improvement of the subject content in the science and English curricula.

UNRWA also contributes to teacher training through its Education Science Faculties in Amman and through continuous in-service training for its schools teachers.

6.7 Civic Education and Discourses around Jordanian Youth

Civic education in Jordan is a politically charged area of the curriculum. It was separated from "national education" during one of the recent curriculum reforms. According to a previous Minister of Education, civic education is mainly conceived of as building awareness of national laws, duties and rights, and aiming to form citizens who are responsible toward their communities.[126] However, programs implemented to

enhance and promote civic education were supported predominantly by U.S. funding and are perceived as heavily influenced by "Western agendas."

Young people in Jordan constitute the majority of the population and many are unemployed, as a result of which, there are deep concerns about threats of social unrest and religious fundamentalism. Broadly speaking, youth are the object of a double discourse: they are a threatening force but also the country's only capital to invest in: as such they are often addressed as the "youth for change."[127] Concerns about young people in Jordan are expressed by not only the Jordanian government but also, increasingly since 2001, the United States and other Western countries, within the wider context of the "War on Terror." Civic education is therefore seen by various actors as a means to promote democratic processes and modern, accountable institutions as well as a general sense of belonging to the nation. However, these discourses tend to downplay the complex post-colonial social fabric of Jordan, the role of women and the voices of young people themselves.[128] Interestingly, Palestinian students in UNRWA schools at first refused to participate in civic education activities, as they perceived them as an attempt to divert Palestinian refugees' attention from their "right to return" by focusing their attention on being Jordanian citizens.[129]

Several initiatives have been carried out to enhance civic education:

- Al-Urdun Awalan (Jordan First) promotes a new mode of civic life (modern, democratic, accountable) aimed at putting national interests above everything else. It targets a generation of young Jordanians who take pride in their homeland, their Arab Nation and Islamic religion, and who promote democracy and effective, responsible participation in shaping their parliamentary institutions to be accountable for and loyal to Jordan.

- Kulna Al-Urdun(We are all Jordan) was launched in 2006 to include youth participation in decision-making processes. However, the commission formed for facilitating youth participation (with 750 members) has long been inactive, mainly for lack of funds. We are all Jordan aimed at promoting the active participation of *all* the citizens, no matter what their origin or status, in order to avoid Islamist threats and "secondary allegiance" to different groups living in the country (such as the Palestinian refugees, for example)[130].

Although there have been several initiatives for promoting civic education in school, interviewees claimed that civic education is essentially a means for inculcating loyalty to the country, whilst freedom of speech, dialogue, and human rights exist neither in schools nor in wider society. The Arab Network for Human Rights and

Civic Education (ANHRE) was established in 2009 to network between the various civic education initiatives and bodies working on human rights and civic education. The network is an important body which works both at country and regional levels. The committee members are based in Jordan, Palestine, Morocco, Egypt, Yemen and Iraq. The network advocates for more effective civic education in schools and for the implementation of extracurricular activities on human rights. However, the executive director of the network reported that the curriculum is so packed with information that teachers cannot really tackle issues related to citizenship and human rights, and often these subjects are neglected in favor of more "prestigious" subjects such as math and Arabic.[131]

6.8 Opportunities and Challenges for Education Reform

Government

Education reform is a top priority of the Jordanian government, which promotes a discourse of human capital investment and education as a means to create a workforce suited to the knowledge economy and in line with global trends of increasing modernization and technologization of the labor market. The ever-present discourses on democratization and education reforms have always been initiated "from above." The King is the main decision-maker and his vision leaves little space for Parliament to discuss reforms, whilst the Ministry of Education has become a mere implementer of plans. Teachers have always had little or no voice concerning the reforms and changes that affect their everyday working lives. The MoE reports the carrying out of consultative sessions for textbook reforms; teachers, by contrast, report that, of their suggestions, only those concerning the order of pages were actually listened to.[132]

Despite MoE restructuring being an aim of ERfKE I, officials from civil society organizations claim that the MoE remains an outdated structure, with under-motivated and under-trained staff. An official at the MoE admitted that when she started training her colleagues on gender issues, they were at first alarmed by these new concepts and not prepared to readily include them in their working environments.[133] The numerous and large education reforms that the country has embarked on seem to have overwhelmed the MoE, which has been unable to keep pace with the introduction of so many changes within so few years.

Civil Society Organizations

In spite of its proclaimed democratic and modernizing projects, Jordan is still an authoritarian country where freedom of association depends on government approval and security checks. Civil society is very weak in Jordan and it has not been allowed to play a major role in any political or democratic reforms. A law banning public gatherings (although some changes have been witnessed in this regard) is a clear indication that the government discourages a more active role of the public and of civil society in particular.

The National Agenda, developed by a steering committee made up of government officials, representatives of the private sector and civil society, has recently restated the freedom of expression granted to citizens along with the possibility of establishing political parties.[134] Nevertheless, civil society organizations face major restrictions by the government, often in the name of security controls. In 2007, the cabinet proposed a New Law on Charitable Societies and Institutions, which Human Rights Watch deems more restrictive than the existing 30-year-old law on civil society organizations.[135] Furthermore, this legislation ignored a counter-draft from civil society organizations, thus demonstrating how civil society's voice remains unheard. The government licenses organizations, approves their funding and can dissolve them for a wide range of reasons. In addition, regulations for organizations to be licensed are so demanding (for example a high start-up capital is required) that many organizations cannot meet the criteria.

Organizations chaired by the Queen are the most active among civil society organizations in Jordan, and royal organizations and initiatives run parallel to the education reforms happening in the country.

The limited space available for criticism and the sensitivity of issues relating to education and to royal decisions was transparent during the interviews, when development practitioners from both national and international organizations tended not to answer "difficult" questions or provide personal or critical analyses. They rather adhered to the official discourses and views, thus suggesting an image contrary to much of what the government is proclaiming (democratic processes, participation, and accountability of institutions).

International Organizations

USAID and the World Bank are involved in setting education priorities, reform and funding. Interviewees did not seem willing to discuss the World Bank and USAID policies, maintaining that they were very much in line with the King's vision of education

(and therefore not easily a subject of debate or critique). USAID assistance is part of the overall US Mission strategy in the country and the region, and is articulated within the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which aims to promote economic growth, educational democracy and good governance in the country. Jordan is depicted as the best example of a country in the region, one that, although subject to continuous external conflicts and regional instability, is steadily proceeding toward democratization and modernization, and combating Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

Another important education player in the international scene is the European Union, which has promoted the role of civil society in furthering debate on human rights, democracy and transparency, and supports the TVET reform.

7. Lebanon: Overcoming Inequality and Division in Education

7.1 Introduction and Background to Education in Lebanon

Decline of Education in the Context of Crisis

While Lebanon's public education system has suffered more than three decades of continuous decline, most discussions about education still begin with a reference to Lebanon's past reputation as having one of the best education systems in the Middle East. Up until the end of the 1970s, the public school system in Lebanon was a source of national pride, and thousands of students from across the region came to study at Lebanon's well-respected universities. The decline of the public education system, including both school education and the public universities, began with the Lebanese civil war, which lasted from 1975 to 1990. More recently, the 2006 war with Israel and the ensuing internal political instability have contributed to further deterioration in the education system and prevented progress at the policy level.

Lebanon is now out of the most recent "emergency phase" and many emergency and reconstruction programs are coming to a close. In 2009, an agreement was reached at the political level to form a national unity government to try to bring an end to the internal strife and political deadlock that have paralyzed the country since 2007. But in the midst of national recovery the public education system in Lebanon remains in a degraded state. While the immediate threat of violent conflict may have receded, the education system itself is in a situation of long-term crisis.

National Education System

The school system in Lebanon is comprised of pre-primary, primary, intermediate and secondary levels. In 1998, Law No. 686 was passed, making primary education in Lebanon free and compulsory until the age of 12 in the initial phase, with a view to extending this to 15 years of age following the implementation of a new education structure.[136] However, the Higher Council for Childhood has noted that there is still very limited public provision of pre-school education for children below the age of 6 (although the government has committed to increasing the availability of services)[137] and in 2008 over 80 percent of pre-primary education was provided by the private sector.[138] Primary education is divided into 3 three-year cycles (cycle 1: 6–9-year-olds; cycle 2: 9–12-year-olds; cycle 3: 12–15-year-olds). The net enrolment rate for primary level education in Lebanon was 82.8 percent in 2007, with a high drop-out rate of 10 percent in public schools.[139] It has been noted that the primary school completion rate of Lebanon is lower than that of Tunisia, Jordan, Iran, Algeria, the West Bank, and Egypt (all of which have lower GNI per capita).[140]

Secondary level education lasts for three years (ages 15–18) with two parallel systems of general education and technical education. School principals decide if students will follow an academic or vocational path based on results of the Brevet examination taken at age 15. Those students who go on to secondary education are entered for the Lebanese Baccalaureate exams in their respective tracks. Students who pass obtain the Lebanese Baccalaureate Certificate of Secondary Education or the Technical Baccalaureate.[141]

Brain Drain and "Youth Exodus" from Lebanon

In the context of conflict and continuing insecurity it is unsurprising that "brain drain" is a longstanding issue in Lebanon, and it is an often-quoted fact that more Lebanese live outside the country than inside it. But over the past three years there has been a newer phenomenon, described by some as a "youth exodus," in response to the growing economic and political instabilities in the country. Unemployment rose from around 14 percent to 20 percent following the war with Israel in 2006,[142] and young Lebanese, particularly students and young professionals, began leaving Lebanon in search of education and employment opportunities abroad. In 2007, national polls suggested that up to one in three Lebanese wanted to leave the country, with this figure rising to 60 percent among young people in the 18—25-year-old age bracket.[143] As the BBC reported that year:

A study by the MADMA research center suggests that 22 percent of the population is actively working on an exit strategy, in a country of just over four million. This would mean that almost 900,000 people are trying to leave the country. The Lebanese Emigration Research Center conducted a study with a sample of 600 university students and found that 60 percent were hoping to leave Lebanon after they graduate in the summer of 2007. [144]

7.2 Degradation of the Public Education System and Dominance of the Private Sector

Many of the interviewees for this study talked about the "degradation" and "deterioration" of public education in Lebanon. Indeed, one of the organizations we spoke to admitted that just four or five years ago they feared that public schools were on the edge of collapse.[145] In the last few years, however, there seems to have been a revival of the public school system due to a number of factors, including strong leadership of the Ministry of Education under the last Minister, Khaled Kabbani.[146] But while there is some renewed hope for change and improvement in public education, big challenges remain, particularly at primary and intermediate levels. Problems include poor education quality, low levels of teacher training, issues of language, high drop-out rates, double-shifts, absenteeism, and violence in schools. Stark political, social and economic factors, together with outdated educational approaches, are combining with policy paralysis, low prioritization of education and a lack of strategy at the government level.

Public schools in Lebanon appear to be seen as schools for the poor, particularly at the primary level. The most powerful indicator of this is the fact that in 2008, only 37 percent of Lebanese children were enrolled in public schools, with 63 percent in private education.[147] Ministry figures show that around half of children are in fully private schools, with a further 12—13 percent in semi-private schools subsidized by the government.[148] While the private sector accounted for 67.6 percent of all primary school enrollment in 2007, the figure is lower for secondary school enrollment at 53.7 percent,[149] with a number of interviewees suggesting that this is because the quality of public secondary education is higher than at primary level. With the recent economic crisis, it was expected that there would be an increase in enrollment in public education,[150] although the latest figures are not yet showing that to be the case, with figures only marginally different between 2000 and 2007.[151] In terms of the geographical

location of private schools, 1995/1996 figures show that 40 percent of private schools were located in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, 18 percent in south Lebanon, 18 percent in the Bekaa Valley, and 20 percent in north Lebanon.[152]

The strength of the private education sector in Lebanon can be seen at all levels: pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary. This prevalence is rooted in historical reasons dating back to the 19th century, when schools were established by colonial Christian missionaries as well as by some Muslim educators for the benefit of elite sections of society. Most significantly, though, 15 years of civil war between 1975 and 1990 meant that public education became extremely weak, while private schools were able to continue to function on the basis of internal and external sources of funding and also became associated with powerful political elites along confessional lines. In her assessment of the Lebanese educational context, Zeina Halabi argues that, following the civil war, "the strong and prestigious private schools have kept their links with political leaders and preserved their traditional autonomy and mistrust of the Lebanese public sector. The relationship of private schools with the Ministry of Education is manifestly unstable and depends on the will of each school to collaborate with the Ministry."[153]

The fact that around 50 percent of children go to fully private schools (with at least a further 12 percent going to semi-private schools) suggests that it is not just children from richer families who are in private education; poorer families are also paying for their children to be educated in private schools. Interviewees suggested a number of possible reasons for this, the first being the overriding perception of poor education quality in the public school system. As one interviewee put it, "Now you would have to be crazy to send your child to a public school, and even if you are poor, you will try to find other ways."[154] Language was another reason put forward, relating to the widely held perception that English is the language of the global economy as well as a necessary prerequisite for entering higher education. While most private schools are trilingual, teaching Arabic, English and French, public schools are generally still bi-lingual, with French rather than English as the predominant language after Arabic, although this too is starting to shift. However, the final and perhaps most significant reason for the dominance of private education in Lebanon relates to religion and confessional identity.

While some private schools are run as businesses, the majority are connected to religious institutions. There are concerns with regard to both private and religiously affiliated schools. Private schools have significant levels of autonomy and although all follow the national curriculum and examinations, not all Ministry decisions are

adopted by private schools. There is also inadequate school monitoring, with implications for ensuring education standards. The director of an international NGO described how she visited a private school to find that there was only one teacher covering all classes and age groups. She believed that this situation relates to the fact that schools run as businesses are ultimately driven by competition rather than educational standards or the best interests of the child, and that a school's income comes down to the number of students enrolled. With regard to religiously affiliated schools, there are wider concerns around the role of education in exacerbating inequality and division in Lebanese society. There is also evidence of a rise in fundamentalist religious teaching and of divisive political agendas being transmitted through the private school system.[155]

7.3 Education, Society and Conflict

Confessional Control and Identity in Education

There is a powerful interplay of factors relating to education quality, religion, identity, community, wealth, the economy and widespread perceptions of "private—good; public—bad" that are shaping parental choices about schooling. Meanwhile, the public school system continues to be under-resourced and deprioritized at the policy level, and many of the interviewees for this study expressed concern about the implications of this for wider Lebanese society. The majority felt that the dominance of the private sector in education exacerbates the social, economic and political divisions in Lebanon, not only in terms of wealth and power inequalities, but also with regard to sabotaging hopes of strengthening an inclusive Lebanese society. Children are divided at a young age, and their identity is shaped not by a national civic identity, but by a confessional identity.

So, to what extent is there a vision for reinstating a common education system in Lebanon? Interestingly, not one interviewee said that he or she *didn't* have this vision, but at the same time it seemed a very long way off, even far-fetched in the current context. Not only is the private sector dominant, but the government is itself subsidizing semi-private schools. The director of one government organization explained that this is because the Lebanese Constitution enshrines the right of every confessional group to provide education for its children. Asked whether this situation could ever change, other interviewees felt that "the only way to change things is to improve public education in order to reduce the need for private education."[156]

It was also pointed out that it is not only the field of education that is dominated by the private sector, but all public services in Lebanon. For example, one interviewee claimed that the majority of the government's health budget goes toward funding private healthcare facilities, and that this shriveling of the public sector is a consequence of the prolonged civil war in Lebanon, as well as the neo-liberal economic agendas of post-war governments.[157] The risk in Lebanon is that weak public institutions compound the weak sense of inclusive nationality and citizenship, and allows confessionally affiliated powers to flourish throughout the private sector. Given the recent specter of revived communal conflict in Lebanon, the role of education in exacerbating these divisions is potentially very dangerous.

Absent Concepts of Inclusive Rights and Citizenship

There are 16 confessional groups in Lebanon, as well as some 400,500 Palestinian refugees, around 40,000 Iraqi refugees, at least 6,000 Sudanese refugees, and an estimated 200,000 migrant workers. Lebanon has long been a diverse society, but concepts such as diversity, plurality, rights and inclusive citizenship remain virtually absent from political debate (nor are they reflected in the education system). National laws continue to make the distinction between "foreigners" and "citizens," regardless of whether those "foreigners" were born in Lebanon, and indeed may even be the fourth or fifth generation inhabitants, as is the case for the Palestinian refugees who have been in Lebanon for 60 years.

While refugees and migrant workers constitute around 17.5 percent of the population in Lebanon,[158] and no doubt a higher percentage among children, even the NGO community fails to include them in national statistics and situation analyses; they are always separated. Meanwhile, the term "inclusive education" is still understood primarily in terms of including children with disabilities in mainstream education, although the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) is attempting to broaden the concept of "inclusive development" to address other forms of discrimination in society.[159]

Linking different social groups through development projects is a very important approach, the potential power of which cannot be underestimated in terms of building a commitment to inclusive development in Lebanon. For example, in its work with Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, one international NGO has not only learned lessons from past programs with Palestinian refugees but also seen important successes in developing joint projects with Iraqi and Palestinian refugees.[160] Another Lebanese NGO deliberately encourages schools based in different regions and young people

from different backgrounds to work together on common projects and campaigns as an indirect way of developing young people's understanding of what it means to be an active citizen in an inclusive society.[161]

The Need for Citizenship Education in Schools

Following the end of the civil war in 1991, there was an overhaul of the education curriculum. But instead of seeing this as a national project toward the rebuilding of society, it ended up causing further divisions. According to one interviewee, civic education was a "big victim" in the failure to establish a vision for education as part of a reconciliation process, together with the existence of "three history books, because nobody can agree on a common historical narrative."[162] The same interviewee explained that although the Ministry's Center for Education Research and Development has "very good people," they are only able to work on a technical level because there is still no political consensus as to what kind of national curriculum should be developed. He argued that while there is certainly "external demand" from donors such as the EU and others for the development of civic education in Lebanon, "it is not a genuine priority for government." The director of another Lebanese NGO had a similar view of the relationship between education and wider societal concerns, and felt that the civil war, national history, and women's role in society are "the three main issues in the educational system" that need to be addressed. She went on to explain that

> ... contemporary Lebanon is not represented in the history textbooks. After the civil war there was no real reconciliation. All the involved parties started to talk immediately, though it was not a real dialogue. They missed a link in the process, a period of silence out of which real reconciliation could have emerged. The old generation will not be able to acknowledge what happened or have any real dialogue with the other parties involved. This is why our organization is working with the new generation of children on issues related to citizenship and nationality. In 2006, the war opened up the wounds of civil war again and this topic is still very sensitive.[163]

Bassel Akar's article "Citizenship Education in Lebanon: An Introduction to Students' Concepts and Learning Experiences" looks at the specific challenges that teachers and students often face in teaching and learning citizenship education in the classroom.[164] His research shows that, broadly, there are two main challenges. The

first relates to pedagogy and the inappropriateness of traditional non-participatory teaching methods for a subject that should be all about encouraging debate and active participation among young people. The second relates to the current limited scope of the subject matter itself. For example, Akar's research techniques included ranking exercises to reveal what students felt citizenship education was all about, and the top result was "knowing the laws of the country," while "debating with others," "volunteering in the community," "protecting the environment," and "taking care of your health" were ranked as relatively low priorities.[165] At the same time, the students expressed a strong sense of national identity and frustration with the contradictions between what is taught in civics textbooks and the behaviors of political leaders in reality, with one student saying, "I see that we live in a state of lies and illusion," and another saying, "I would like to know why people start to lose their good citizenship as they get older." Akar concludes from his research:

> Even though a small-scale study, the paradoxical and controversial relationships between student concepts and learning experiences are clear and evident … The youth in Lebanon are clearly aware of the social and political tensions and potential conflicts in their society. They are also highly motivated to participate in an active, democratic and humanistic society by wanting to know "how to solve the country's problems." And finally, they share a common vision of peace and social cohesion, "Just imagine a world where Muslims and Christians are equal and are brothers and [there is] no war." Continuous investigations into the challenges of teaching and learning citizenship is critical in strengthening a sense of community and living together in Lebanon and possibly also making sense of similar challenges in other post-conflict pluralistic societies around the world.[166]

7.4 Inequalities in Access to Quality Education

Perceptions of What Quality Education Means

In talking about the poor quality of education in Lebanon, most of the interviewees focused their concerns on the lack of teacher training, inadequate monitoring of school standards, and issues of school infrastructure and equipment. A common concern was also that the French-oriented Brevet and Baccalaureate examinations are geared toward a privileged student population with, for example, access to com-

puters and the internet, and as such are contributing to the failure and drop-out of children from poorer backgrounds. As one official put it, "This system is fine for the elite children but it doesn't make sense in a refugee camp because we don't have the resources to make it work."[167] Another common issue raised was the lack of parental participation and the need for establishing Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in public schools.[168]

Further objections were raised in relation to the focus on examination results-based indicators and the consequent sidelining of other important work that goes on inside schools. As one official put it:

> How do you measure education quality? There are many indicators. It is a complex situation for UNRWA in Lebanon working in this context. Ethically we cannot only give "pure education" [referring to literacy and numeracy skills]. What about teaching children about their human rights? Also elections: the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon don't practice elections because they are not citizens, they don't have a state. Should we ignore this or actively teach children about the principles of democracy? Do we give young people the skills to deal with life and resolve conflicts or not? There are so many questions, but people from outside only look at us in terms of achievement in examinations.[169]

In other words, a school in a refugee camp in Lebanon has many challenging issues to contend with and it is not fair to judge it only on student performance in examinations, and yet so far UNRWA in Lebanon has not formally established other criteria. This is in contrast to UNRWA in the West Bank, a very different context in which to be operating, which has identified four streams for measuring education quality including Quality of Education, School Management, Community Participation, and Child Well Being.

While improving education quality is a major priority for UNRWA, according to one official, "a lot has gone into concrete," meaning infrastructure and building new schools. The rationale for this is to address overcrowding in classrooms and move schools toward single-shift rather than double-shift days. For example, all schools in the Tyre area in south Lebanon will now be single-shift, facilitating a longer school day and teaching contact time. But while the assumption is that this will eventually translate into better exam results at Brevet level, UNRWA was not yet seeing this at the time of writing, though the education program has undergone significant developments since.[170]

Lack of Teacher Training and Poor Pay

Numerous interviewees talked about the lack of teacher training in Lebanon, and according to the World Bank's education database, up to 88 percent of teachers are not qualified.[171] In 2004—2005 an estimated 44 percent of teachers had a university degree and 45 percent of teachers had a Baccalaureate or less.[172] A reform effort launched in the mid-1990s aimed to restructure the education system and implement a new curriculum, as well as to provide in-service training to teachers, but from this study it was unclear the extent to which this is happening effectively. The director of one international NGO (INGO) was also concerned by a move toward different types of teacher recruitment (in particular short-term contracts)—with different levels of training provided.[173]

The situation is similar in UNRWA schools in the Palestinian refugee camps. An interviewee who had herself been a teacher in an UNRWA school after getting a BA in Arabic, described her own experience, saying, "I used to teach 48 students [in one class] at eighth grade. How will you be able to teach in that classroom? I taught for one year in schools, just following my own instinct. There is no proper training for teachers, probably they know the subject but they don't know how to teach. This is a big problem for quality."[174] She also talked about the move toward "daily paid teachers" in UNRWA schools as opposed to permanent employees.

The director of a Lebanese NGO felt that public schools at secondary level tended to be better than elementary and intermediate levels for several reasons: "In secondary schools teachers have fewer hours to teach, they are better paid, and they need to have a degree in the subject they teach [so] they are educated to degree level. At the level of sixth to ninth grade, teachers do not necessarily have higher education."[175] Teachers are also poorly paid and as a result the teaching profession has become very gendered. As one interviewee pointed out, it is not an adequate wage to support a family, so is not considered a good job for a "bread winner."[176] It is also relatively common for public school teachers to teach in private schools to supplement their income.

High Drop-out Rates

The drop-out rate in Lebanon is high at around 10 percent in public schools and 6 percent in private schools.[177] The fourth and eighth grades see the highest level of drop-out for a number of reasons related to social, economic, and pedagogical factors. The curriculum also presents critical issues, particularly in relation to language: "When the teacher switches to the foreign language, many students cannot cope and this contributes to the high rates of drop-out."[178]

For example, Movement Social aims to raise awareness about those who drop out as well as support young people who have dropped out of school through their non-formal education activities. Civil society organizations started talking about the drop-out issue some ten years ago, and since then, tackling drop-out has become a priority for the Ministry. For example, an agreement between the Ministry and the EU focusing on child protection issues, drop-out and citizenship will start in 2011. The Ministry has also asked Movement Social and other NGOs to enter in the partnership and give technical support.

Child labor is one key factor, and in 2000, UNICEF estimated that 45.3 percent of children aged 6 to 14 were working in Lebanon. Children are employed in a range of industries, with approximately 11 percent employed in agriculture. In 2000, national reports estimated that 25,000 children aged between 7 and 14 were working in tobacco cultivation. Reportedly, the employment of children under the age of 10 in other sectors is rare. In poorer, more remote areas child labor is more prominent, while Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon are more likely to work than their Lebanese counterparts.[179]

Lack of Land and Problems of Infrastructure

There is an unequal distribution of schools and teachers in Lebanon, resulting in an astounding national student—teacher ratio of one teacher for every nine students, despite over-crowded classrooms in some areas.[180] This is due to badly managed distribution of teachers, and an imbalance of school infrastructure. Numerous interviewees talked about the over-emphasis on south Lebanon in post-war reconstruction efforts (both after the civil war and the 2006 war) resulting in the neglect of poorer areas in the north and the northeast of the country in the Bekaa Valley. As one interviewee described, post-war reconstruction in the south led to schools being "built like castles," but at the same time migration from the south to Beirut has meant that there are fewer children going to school there. Meanwhile, there is the opposite problem in the north, where there are not enough teachers or school premises. To overcome the land issue, one interviewee said the government was planning to build school "complexes" in Beirut, where there might be three or four schools doing double shifts on one piece of land, but this was not verified.

School Violence

In a report for Save the Children Sweden, *Corporal Punishment in Lebanon: The Role of the Public Administration in Implementing a Ban on Corporal Punishment in Schools*,

the author finds clear gaps between policy and reality, and a need for an increased role for civil society and NGOs to work on the issue and hold public authorities to account.[181] UNRWA is also trying to address violence in schools and corporal punishment, and has recently introduced a zero-tolerance policy on school violence. But it is facing resistance from parents as well as teachers, who see corporal punishment as necessary for discipline, and in particular because teachers have complained that they are now the targets of student—teacher violence.[182]

Role of Civil Society in Improving Teaching Methods and the School Environment

In addition to government and donor activities with regard to improving the quality of education in Lebanon's public school system, some national and international NGOs are also getting involved in trying to improve teaching methods as well as the wider school environment. For example, a current project with UNRWA focuses on instilling more participatory teaching methodologies and changing school environments.[183] UNICEF is also supporting specific schools in trying to set up a model of "child friendly schools," as well as introducing initiatives whereby private schools support public schools, to encourage mentoring and sharing experiences.[184] Meanwhile, the Arab Resource Collective is pushing for greater involvement and participation of parents in the school process, by advocating for PTAs to be included in governmental policies.[185]

7.5 Discrimination Against Refugees and "Non-citizens"

Palestinian Refugees

If the public schools in Lebanon face problems, UNRWA schools in the country's 12 Palestinian refugee camps struggle even more. Exam results are lower, drop-out rates are substantially higher, and problems of double shifts, overcrowded classrooms and school violence are the norm. These issues are discussed in the relevant sections of this report, but to understand the root causes of education inequality for Palestinian children, looking at the wider context outside the classroom is critical.

In particular, there is a high rate of Palestinian children living below the poverty line, and a very low standard of living in relation to accessing decent housing, water,

sanitation, health and education services, as well as income-related indicators.[186] This in turn is linked to high levels of discrimination against Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, particularly through discriminatory laws preventing refugees from working as well as building and owning property, and accessing public and social services.[187] On top of this there are often acute internal political tensions in the camps, most of which are governed by one dominant Palestinian political faction, and all camps are subject to further external sources of insecurity. This latent insecurity most recently blew up in 2007, with the Lebanese army's destruction of Nahr Al-Bared camp in northern Lebanon, in response to the activities of fundamentalist groups sheltering inside the camp. The 15-week long siege resulted in 400 people being killed, 30,000 Palestinians displaced (of which 10,000 are still displaced), and enormous infrastructural damage to homes, UN facilities, schools, clinics, and NGO services. Access to basic education for Palestinian children in Nahr Al-Bared was severely impeded as a result. Two years on, around 90 percent of the rubble has been cleared, but political barriers imposed by the Lebanese government have meant that reconstruction of the camp began only recently, in August 2009.[188] Meanwhile the camp's economy is in tatters and Lebanese—Palestinian relations in wider society, already difficult, have been set back further.

According to Amnesty International:

> The Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon is one of the world's most longstanding refugee populations and Palestinian refugees account for approximately one tenth of Lebanon's total population. They remain, however, a highly deprived community ... The discrimination to which Palestinian refugees are subject to in Lebanon impacts particularly on Palestinian children, whose ability to access basic human rights, such as the right to education, is impeded through the existence of such restrictions.[189]

Drop-out, in particular, is a big problem in UNRWA schools, and huge decreases are seen in enrollment among 13- to 15-year-olds. This is for a variety of reasons relating to poverty, child labor, poor education quality, and lack of motivation to study due to Lebanon's restrictions on Palestinians' right to work, which raises inevitable questions for young people about what the point is in studying if it won't lead to opportunities in the workplace. There is a need to explore these "causes" for drop-out in more detail, and UNRWA has commissioned new research on the topic in response to the fact that basic statistics do not sufficiently capture the wide range of factors and experiences of those who leave school early.[190]

One official also reflected on the entrance of students for the Baccalaureate examinations (at grade 12), for which UNRWA schools obtain a high pass-rate of over 90 percent, as opposed to 50—60 percent at the Brevet level.[191] There are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that only high-achieving students tend to go on to study for the Baccalaureate. There is also perhaps a "hidden factor" of extra determination and motivation among certain students to get out of the camp environment and go to university against all odds.[192]

There is no pre-school provision by UNRWA, so a number of NGOs provide it in the camps. Historically, pre-school provision in the Palestinian camps has tended to be politicized, with political parties playing a major role. So, for example, leftist parties have their own kindergartens, as do Fatah, Hamas and other groups. While this situation continues, there is at the same time increasing professionalization in the pre-school sector led by certain NGOs in coordination with UNRWA.[193]

In theory, Palestinian children do have access to the Lebanese education system, and numbers in UNRWA schools have noticeably dropped over the past few years, which must mean that up to a third of Palestinian children are going either to Lebanese public schools or private schools.[194] However, the reality of enormous inequalities in accessing education for one tenth of the population in Lebanon remains, as described by the Refugee Children Committee overseen by the Higher Council for Childhood:

> The educational levels of Palestinian children are not comparable to that of Lebanese children or even to Palestinian children in neighboring Arab hosting countries. Out of three Palestinian children in Lebanon, aged 10 and above, one child leaves school before finishing primary or intermediate. The drop-out rate is 39 percent ... As for those holding high school degrees or higher education, they are few in number.[195]

Iraqi and Other Refugees in Lebanon

According to UNHCR, more than half the estimated 40,000 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon are children. A recent survey by the Danish Refugee Council found that only 40 percent of Iraqi children living in Lebanon have pursued studies after elementary school. More than half of households do not send their children to school.[196] The Norwegian Refugee Council has opened an Education Resource Center to provide facilities for intensive learning and provide mental health services. Other organizations, such as World Vision, say that mental health services and treatment for psychological scars is a major concern for Iraqi refugee children.

It is not just Iraqi and Palestinian refugees in the country. Over 6,000 Sudanese refugees from Southern Sudan and Darfur are currently residing in Lebanon as a result of the civil war. But Lebanon is not a signatory to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, so refugees coming to the country do not have automatic rights or protection. Due to the influx of refugees into Lebanon since the beginning of 2006, UNHCR has stopped its earlier grant of US$300 per child per year to families in Lebanon. Denied access to legal employment, and even education in many cases, refugees in Lebanon are struggling to cope.

Migrant Workers

There are 200,000 migrant workers in Lebanon, some 5 percent of the population, and many of them are women from African, South and South-East Asian countries. As is the case for refugees in Lebanon, they are unprotected by labor laws, but unlike most refugees, they are often unregistered and so are even more vulnerable to abuses by employers, particularly female domestic workers who live within the family home. In October 2009, Human Rights Watch in Beirut re-launched "Put Yourself in Her Shoes"—a campaign to highlight abuses against domestic workers.

In October 2008, IRIN reported that "Children of domestic workers in Lebanon are an invisible segment of society."[197] Their children born in Lebanon have no official identity, and no statistics on their numbers exist. For Sri Lankans, Filipinos and West Africans, Lebanese law allows for a child who is already registered in a Lebanese school to have residency, but many children of domestic workers face marginalization and racism because of their parents' social status.

7.6 Exclusion of Children with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties

According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, some 60 percent of children with a disability card have never been to school.[198] In Palestinian camps, close to 60 percent of children with disabilities are illiterate, and only 44 percent of children with disabilities between the ages of 10 and 14 are enrolled in school, despite the fact that the majority (58 percent) have physical rather than intellectual or sensory disabilities.[199] While UNRWA has an official commitment to mainstreaming disabled children in schools, some interviewees talked about lack of appropriate support and resources to facilitate

this. For example, one former UNRWA teacher who now works for a Palestinian NGO remembered teaching "five children with slow learning. I gave them different assignments, but there was no support or special classes for them at all."[200]

Strikingly, the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU) is a leading organization in Lebanese civil society. For example, LPHU was a key player in getting the government to pass Law No. 220 in 2000, which enshrined the rights of disabled people in Lebanon. It also had a significant impact in ensuring that the plans for reconstruction following the 2006 war, and to some extent also following the destruction of Nahr Al-Bared refugee camp, met accessibility standards for people with disabilities.[201] LPHU also used the opportunity of the 2008 elections in Lebanon to persuade the government to issue a decree to make all polling stations accessible for disabled people, which had a further impact on the education sector because most polling stations are schools. It has since done a mapping of all public schools in Lebanon and carried out a cost-benefit analysis for making all schools accessible over six years, estimating a cost of 0.8 percent of the education budget.[202] Importantly, LPHU has started to broaden the concept of "inclusive development" in Lebanon to incorporate all disadvantaged sections of the society, echoed in the government's own National Inclusion Program in Lebanon (NIPL).[203]

7.7 Opportunities and Challenges for Education Reform

Government

While education is still not a major policy priority in Lebanon, particularly in the context of conflict and political crisis in the country since 2006, the previous Minister of Education, Khaled Kabbani, is regarded as having pulled the public education system back from the brink through launching a series of reforms to address the quality of education.[204] Some interviewees spoke about having renewed hope for improvements in public education. As the director of one international NGO said, "If you had asked me four years ago, I would have been frightened for public education ... but now I think there is hope for things to get better."[205] The current Ministry of Education is also regarded as being committed to education reform, although it has been somewhat restricted by the overall paralysis in government following the 2006 war and resulting internal political instability.

From an advocacy perspective, one interviewee noted that in the current context decision-makers change frequently, thus making it difficult to build up sustained relationships to influence policy.[206] Another interviewee also talked about a confused structure within the Ministry and consequent lack of clear lines for decision making, with different units even appearing in competition with one another at times.[207]

Growing Influence of Civil Society in Policy Processes

In the context of political instability, there has also been a lack of funding due to stringent donor conditions. Yet there remains significant dependence on international donors and, as one interviewee put it, "the Ministry is operating on projects." Perhaps by necessity as well as by design, the Ministry has become more engaged with civil society organizations in recent years, in contrast to past resistance.[208]

Numerous interviewees commented on the fact that there is now much more scope for engaging directly with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education on policy issues, and indeed there is a government NGO working-group on education, involving a number of international and local organizations. A similar situation exists within UNRWA, which is increasingly reaching out to international and local organizations to tackle the challenges involved in improving the quality of education in UNRWA schools.[209]

International Organizations

The World Bank is a key player in education development in Lebanon, particularly through the Education Development Project, which has been running since 2000. The World Bank has its own secondment within the Ministry's Center for Education Research and Development (CERD). At the time of writing, the Education Development Project was due to come to a close in December 2009, though support may continue in another form. The original project aims were to "restore credibility in the public education system, by improving the quality of and access to education. The two main components are: 1) the management and institutional development will introduce an Education Management Information System (EMIS) to support, and 2) document decision-making practices and develop a national education strategy."[210]

It is worth noting that some local civil society actors have argued that "instead of addressing the root causes of the economic and social challenges facing Lebanon, the World Bank is promoting a 'one-size-fits-all' formula of privatization and liberalization in various sectors."[211] In particular, the Arab NGOs Network for Development (ANND)

believes that in relation to health and education the World Bank has concluded that relatively high investment (4 percent for each sector and the national expenditure for both sectors represents 23 percent of GDP) is not resulting in good outcomes due to inefficiency within the public administration of these sectors. "In response to this deduction the Bank proposed to improve the role of the government in reforming these sectors in addition to regulating and organizing the role of the private sector in health and education."[212]

8. Palestine: Declining Quality and Education Outcomes

8.1 Introduction and Background to Education in Palestine

Political Context in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip

The political context in Palestine is uncertain, and new developments are constantly unfolding. In addition to the context of 42 years of Israeli occupation in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip, and the impact this has had on education, there is an ongoing convergence of internal Palestinian politics and external Israeli and international pressures, which can also find their way into the classroom.

Following the election of a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority (PA) in the 2006 Palestinian elections, the international community imposed a freeze on all international funding to the PA. Despite a temporary international mechanism being set up to channel funds to the health and education sectors to avoid their collapse, teachers were excluded from this and consequently did not receive regular salaries for nearly two years (22 months), resulting in open-ended strikes.[213] Internal fighting between Fatah and Hamas eventually erupted in June 2007, and the unity government collapsed.

Since June 2007 there has been a divided Palestinian administration, with the political party Fatah in control of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and a Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. While the international community is backing the Fatah-controlled PA with funds and political support, the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip is heavily blockaded by Israel and politically and financially cut off by the international community, resulting in a persistent state of humanitarian crisis.[214] This crisis escalated in 2009 with a 22-day Israeli military offensive, which resulted in

over 1,400 Palestinians being killed, including some 350 children, and destruction of homes and public infrastructure, including schools and universities.

Development of a Palestinian Education System Since 1994

The Palestinian education system is 15 years old. Prior to 1994, the Jordanian and Egyptian curricula were in use in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, under the control of the Israeli authorities. In many countries affected by conflict, the question is how to *re-build* an education system that has been ravaged by war. In the case of Palestine, this task was coupled with how to build something that had never been in place before: a national education system. The implications of this were far-reaching, from establishing a Ministry of Education with virtually no experience in educational planning, to conceptualizing a new national curriculum in the context of unresolved political questions about the creation of a Palestinian state.

Palestinian Education System

Palestinian schools are divided into three sectors, including public schools under the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), accounting for approximately 70 percent of all students; UNRWA schools, serving around 24 percent of students; and private schools, belonging to various charities or religious organizations, accounting for around 6—8 percent of students. UNRWA does not provide secondary education (grades 11 and 12) and, according to Ministry figures from 2005 to 2006, after the age of 16, 97 percent of students are enrolled in government schools and 3 percent in private schools.[216]

Grades 1 to 10 are compulsory and all students follow the same curriculum. After Grade 10, students can choose to continue in the academic track, or attend one of a limited number of vocational schools. At the end of grade 12, all students are required to sit for the school matriculation exams (the Tawjihi), which then determine whether a student will be admitted to university.

There are 11 Palestinian universities, which have evolved since the 1970s, and although they are regarded as important national institutions, strict movement restrictions under the Israeli occupation have meant that universities are becoming increasingly localized. For example, in 2000 there were around 350 students from the Gaza Strip at Birzeit University located in the West Bank; by 2005 this number had decreased to 35, and today there are none.[217]

8.2 Education in the Context of Occupation and Violent Conflict

Education under Occupation

With the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli military administration assumed control of the education system, leaving in place the existing division between the Egyptian education system in the Gaza Strip and the Jordanian system in the West Bank. East Jerusalem, meanwhile, was annexed and subject to Israeli laws, although the government eventually retreated from its initial policy of enforcing the Israeli national curriculum in the occupied part of the city, and throughout the 1970s, East Jerusalem schools switched back to a modified Jordanian curriculum.

For almost three decades, from 1967 to 1994, Palestinian education saw little development, and during the First Intifada between 1987 and 1992, most schools and universities were subject to military closure by the Israeli authorities as sites of political unrest.[218]However, it was during this period that a progressive civic movement for educational change began to emerge within Palestinian civil society, with far-reaching implications. Schools and universities continued to hold classes "underground" in homes, offices, mosques, churches and community centers, and this need for an alternative education system in response to the closure of the formal one facilitated a burst of innovation and progressive new thinking around pedagogy and the curriculum.[219] Teachers started to critically and collectively examine *what* they were teaching and, moreover, *how* it was being taught. In addition to informal neighborhood networks, a number of education NGOs and networks were established during this period, most of which are still active today.[220]

With the signing of the Oslo peace agreement in 1993, a new Palestinian National Authority was created and in 1994 the first-ever Palestinian Ministry of Education was established. The subsequent and ongoing process of developing a new Palestinian education system is described below. But in September 2000, the very same month that the first Palestinian textbooks were introduced into schools, the Second Intifada erupted and the whole educational process was plunged back into crisis. Once again, the Israeli army targeted schools and universities as sites of "unrest," while closures, curfews and movement restrictions resulted in huge numbers of teaching days being lost. In 2002, the Israeli Army raided the Ministry of Education offices, destroying files, records, computers and other equipment.[221]

The political situation in 2009 is hardly less volatile, though the main site of conflict has shifted to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. However, residents of the West Bank and East Jerusalem still face similar levels of movement restrictions as they did five years ago, with over 600 checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the territory.[222] Furthermore, as the building of the Israeli Wall (sometimes called "Separation Wall") throughout the West Bank and around East Jerusalem nears completion, and the blockade over the Gaza Strip continues into its fourth year, education access for some has become harder than ever.

Controversy Over the Development of a Palestinian National Curriculum

The Palestinian Authority established an independent Palestinian Curriculum Development Center (PCDC) in 1994 to design the new curriculum, and in 1996 the PCDC published its 600-page report. Drawing on the new thinking that had emerged among Palestinian educators in the late 1980s and early 1990s, together with the latest pedagogical ideas from abroad, the report recommended far-reaching changes in teaching methodologies as well as new content. First and foremost it insisted upon a system that would encourage critical thinking over memorization and rote learning, going so far as to recommend the abolition of the long-standing high school Tawjihi exam.[223]

However, many of these recommended reforms never materialized, in part due to resistance from more conservative forces within the Palestinian Authority itself.[224] Furthermore, as the writing and publication of new textbooks got underway, the question of how to tackle Palestinian history, national identity and current political realities became increasingly problematic. Ali Jarbawi, a member of the first curriculum development team, articulated some of these issues when he asked:

> What Palestine do we teach? Is it the historic Palestine with its complete geography, or the Palestine that is likely to emerge on the basis of possible agreements with Israel? How do we view Israel? Is it merely an ordinary neighbor, or is it a state that has arisen on the ruins of most of Palestine? This may well be one of the most difficult questions, but the answer to it need not be the most difficult. The new Palestinian curriculum should be creative, pragmatic, and truthful without having to engage in historical falsifications.[225]

The first Palestinian textbooks published in 2000 came under intense international scrutiny, with claims such as "there is a systematic effort in the textbooks to

demonize Israel and the Israelis," and "Palestinian textbooks use terminology that is associated with war and violence."[226] Yet in subsequent independent studies these allegations have proved unfounded. For example, Nathan Brown argues that the preoccupation with external controversy over the Palestinian curriculum has masked far more important debates at the internal level in relation to conflicting progressive and traditionalist ideas about the role of education in the development of Palestinian society.[227] With regard to the external allegations against the Palestinian textbooks, he concludes:

> The Palestinian curriculum is not a war curriculum; while highly nationalistic, it does not incite hatred, violence and anti-Semitism. It cannot be described as a "peace curriculum" either, but the charges against it are often wildly exaggerated or inaccurate.[228]

The long-term impact of the international publicity against the Palestinian textbooks has been "nothing short of disastrous."[229] Almost immediately, donors pulled out of supporting curriculum development and diverted funds to other projects. Today, references are still made to Palestinian education along the lines of "teaching children to hate," despite a lack of credible evidence to back up the claim.[230] Interviewees for this study also highlighted the "politically sensitive" nature of education development in Palestine.

Access to Education Is Still a Major Issue

Enrollment rates in Palestine are close to 100 percent, and the major focus of national and international actors working in the field of education has shifted to improving the quality of education on offer.[231] However, as one UN official pointed out, high enrollment does not mean unfettered access, and the physical barriers to freedom of movement within the West Bank have a continuing impact on the ability of students and teachers to reach the classroom.[232] The Israeli wall in the West Bank and some 613 military checkpoints and roadblocks[233] affect all aspects of daily life in the West Bank and frequently prevent people from getting to work, or going to school. Furthermore, the military barriers in place restrict access in and out of the major Palestinian towns, so teachers and students are limited in their ability to teach in a different part of the West Bank or to go to a university in another town, even though it may be no more than a few miles away.

In its monthly Movement and Access reports, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) refers to "closure obstacles," which include

permanently staffed checkpoints, roadblocks, earth mounds, earth walls, road barriers, road gates and trenches, as well as "partial checkpoints," which are points of control staffed on an ad hoc basis. OCHA monitors the number of closure obstacles on a monthly basis and "despite some definitional differences, this figure [613 in June 2009] has been confirmed by the IDF Central Command and OCHA, following detailed crosschecking and a series of joint field trips." OCHA also notes: "Not included in the 613 figure, but equally important, are 84 obstacles blocking Palestinian access and movement within the Israeli controlled area of Hebron City (H2), 63 crossing points along the Barrier, also known as 'Barrier gates,' which control Palestinian movement into West Bank areas on the west side of the Barrier, and an average of 70 random ('flying') checkpoints deployed every week since the beginning of 2009."[234]

For the purposes of this study, we went through Qalandia checkpoint situated outside Ramallah for a number of morning meetings in Jerusalem, and so happened to be there at the same time as school children on their way to school. Movement and access statistics alone do not capture the high stress of travelling through a military checkpoint like Qalandia twice a day, which entails long queues, intimidating metal corridors and turnstiles, and an aggressive atmosphere. Watching the crowds of school children, as young as 9 or 10 years old, making this daily journey on their own, raised the question of what impacts this must be having on their mental health, quite apart from their access to education.

Psychosocial Impacts of the Conflict on Children and the Role of Education

Numerous studies have been conducted in relation to the psychosocial impacts of living under occupation for children[235] and the role that education can play in relieving some of these impacts.[236] The Education in Emergencies framework stresses the importance of including education in humanitarian responses, to ensure continued access to learning and to provide places of continuity and normality in children's lives.[237]

For example, children's centers run by the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, provide spaces where children can go to do drawing and drama therapy to help them express their feelings. According to Christian Aid, a UK-based partner of the association, "this is crucial support for children who have lost parents, brothers or sisters, or who [have been] injured in attacks ... Helping them cope with feelings of fear and anger is important not only for their own emotional development but also for the hope of a future peace between Palestinians and Israelis."[238]

8.3 The Blockade of the Gaza Strip and Its Impact on Education

Impact of Conflict and Blockade on Gaza's Education Resources

According to the UN, 18 schools were destroyed and some 280 schools and nurseries damaged by bombs and artillery during Israel's 22-day military offensive in the Gaza Strip earlier this year, including over a quarter of UNRWA's 200 primary schools.[239]Six university buildings in Gaza were also destroyed and 16 were damaged.[240]

While reconstruction is underway, many schools are still awaiting repairs due to the prevention of basic construction materials from entering into the Gaza Strip as a result of the continuing Israeli blockade. The Ministry of Education reports that classes still have to squeeze in up to 55 students in order to accommodate students from damaged schools.[241] Meanwhile, the cost for repairing higher education institutions is estimated at $21.1 million, according to the Palestinian National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza.[242]

Aside from damaged infrastructure, the ongoing blockade is preventing even basic school supplies such as pens, paper and textbooks from entering the Gaza Strip.[243] For example, the deputy director of the Palestinian Chamber of Commerce estimates that 90 percent of the student population is affected and that 1,750 containers of school supplies and stationery worth $150 million have been blocked.[244] According to Human Rights Watch, UNRWA has been unable to print 10 percent of required textbooks because Israel has not approved the necessary ink and paper imports, and it has also been unable to distribute stationery and pencils to students as planned. Furthermore, Israel has not approved imports of 5,000 school desks for UNRWA students and 4,000 tables and chairs for teachers in classrooms. UNRWA official Aidan O'Leary explains, "Because we don't have enough space for our students, we need to import portable container classrooms, but we are still waiting for them."[245]

According to the recent mid-year review of the United Nations 2009 Consolidated Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "a lack of access to education supplies due to access restrictions is one of the greatest obstacles in ensuring the delivery of quality education, combined with damage to the schools hit during the war."[246] Strategic priorities for education outlined in the CAP Appeal include school rehabilitation and repairs, the creation of alternative learning opportunities to counter declining learning achievements, addressing trauma among children through psychosocial support and moving toward greater normalcy in education, including regular school attendance and parental involvement.[247]

Crisis in Gaza Education Leading to Major Inequality Gaps

The impact of the growing gulf between the West Bank and Gaza Strip on the Palestinian education system is immense, with 450,000 school children and tens of thousands of university students in Gaza paying the price. There are now two Ministries of Education, with limited cooperation. Basic school supplies are blocked from entering into Gaza,[248] and international funds are frozen. Inequalities in education resources and outcomes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are opening up as a result. While official figures are hard to come by, numerous interviewees pointed to the gap between the West Bank and Gaza as a major and increasing area of inequality in Palestinian education.[249]

Decreasing social and political space in Gaza

The impact of the blockade of the Gaza strip is not only felt in economic and humanitarian terms. Isolated and cut off from the wider world, there is growing fundamentalism in Gaza, and young people and women in particular are bearing the brunt of this. For example, respected organizations working with children to provide safe places for play through theatre, summer camps and arts programs have been attacked several times by militants.

Interviewees also talked about the fact that the Hamas Ministry of Education in Gaza has put pressure on schools to ensure that female students wear headscarves. While it has been denied that this is official policy and attributed instead to school principals, most believe that the signal is coming from the Hamas government in Gaza.[252]

While there are some excellent civil society organizations in the Gaza Strip, they are fewer in number and face greater challenges than those in the West Bank. This is partly due to donor conditions (for example, specifying that funds need to come though Ramallah) but also to political conditions, staff capacity and resources.[253]

The director of one organization in Ramallah has considered the possibility of opening a similar center in Gaza, but is worried about whether this would simply reinforce the growing gulf between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and an acceptance of the fact that one organization for the whole of Palestine is no longer seen as possible.[254] However, other bigger organizations working on health and agriculture, including the Palestinian Medical Relief Society and the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees, have long had a dual but coordinated operation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and are among the oldest and most active organizations in Palestine.

Most would agree that it is vitally important that civil society in Gaza is not neglected by international partners.

8.4 Declining Education Indicators in Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza Strip

The major focus of the national Education Development Strategic Plan 2008—2012 is "toward quality education for development." While the first education plan (2002—2006)[255] focused on issues of access and infrastructure, responding to the basic needs of an education system just recently handed over after 30 years under Israeli military control, by 2008 enrollment levels were high, school buildings were in place, and quality was emerging as the key priority concern.

The focus on quality was in response to a number of reports indicating a serious decline in achievement outcomes. A World Bank education sector report on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2006 highlighted declining national education standards in public, private and UNRWA schools since the start of the Second Intifada in 2000.[256] International comparative testing (TIMSS 2003 and 2007) pointed to serious declines in standards, and this was confirmed by national testing carried out by the PA's Ministry of Education in 2008 and independent testing in UNRWA schools by the PA's Center for Assessment and Evaluation in the same year.[257] Results across Arabic, mathematics and science subjects were, according to one UN official, "really alarming."[258]

So why have standards declined over recent years? A UN official in Ramallah felt that there were four main areas to which the decline could be attributed: inadequate teacher training to cope with the new curriculum; declining social, political and economic situation since the start of the Second Intifada in 2000; increasing problems of access to schools due to closure, curfews and checkpoints; and inevitable "teething problems" of the new curriculum. This analysis was echoed by other interviewees, including the director of a Palestinian NGO, who referred to the "huge pressures on students, teachers and parents due to social, political and economic stress. They introduced the new curriculum just as the Intifada started [in 2000]—there was a need to upgrade the educational level but at the same time everything around wasn't helping, it was all going in the other direction."[259]

Other interviewees also pointed toward the degradation of the teaching profession. For example, the director of another Palestinian NGO felt that "the quality of

education really started to decline since 2005. There has been a burning out of teachers, they are exhausted not only by the situation, but from lack of money, training and trust."[260] A similar view was put forward by a Palestinian educationalist and former author of the civic education textbooks, who explained:

> There is a lack of incentives for teachers, and low salaries. For 22 months [2006—2007] teachers didn't receive their salaries at all because the international community boycotted the PA. You also need to think about who is teaching now. It is the graduates of the First Intifada, and they have a lot of weaknesses and gaps in their education [due to the military closure of schools and universities during this period]. Also there are difficulties with the curriculum: it's too long, too complicated, a lot of the teachers complain about it.[261]

8.5 Strategies for Improving Education Quality and Teacher Development

In light of the concerns around declining quality in Palestinian education, the Ministry's new Education Development Strategic Plan 2008—2012 states:

> The improvement of the quality of education will be the main focus in the coming period. A national strategy for teacher education will be implemented; the General Education curriculum and textbooks will be reviewed and developed periodically. For TVET, the MoEHE will produce Competence-Based Modularized Curricula. And, a major effort to improve the quality of higher education will be made, including encouraging research.[262]

The focus on teachers within this plan for improving quality is in recognition of the fact that teachers are "burnt out" due to poor teaching conditions, low pay (and for almost two years, between 2006 and 2007, no salaries at all) and an overall decline in the prestige of the teaching profession. There are also fundamental weaknesses in the training of teachers, which faculty within the education departments at Birzeit and Bethlehem universities blamed on the absence of a coherent teaching qualification. Currently, graduates of most subjects can go straight into the classroom without any teacher training at all, while teachers who have spent time and money gaining a teaching diploma receive little reward for this investment, so there is no incentive to do it.[263]

The director of one Palestinian NGO also admitted limited impact of their own teacher training programs over the past 10 years. "Since 1995, we have trained over 30,000 teachers and run at least 2,000 training courses, but in evaluating our work we discovered that we were having a small impact on what was happening inside the classroom. For this reason we think change can only happen through focusing more on the policy side."[264]

The Ministry's new Teacher Education Strategy in Palestine seeks to address some of these issues, with key objectives around accrediting different types of teacher training programs to enable more teachers to study for a BA in Education; new curricula and teaching and learning methods to be incorporated into teacher training programs; the introduction of field experience and practice teaching as part of the training; continuing development programs; enhancing working conditions, career development and reviewing salary scales; and enhancing the Ministry's management of teacher education.[265]

UNRWA's education department in the West Bank has also recently launched a comprehensive Education Recovery Plan, including an important conceptualization of how to improve the quality of education for poor and marginalized communities in a complex political context.[266] The Plan emphasizes four "strategic domains":

- *Quality of Education:* An integrated approach to improving the quality of education in UNRWA schools through developing content, teaching methods and monitoring standards;

- *School Management:* the focus in on the development of schools and the enablement of effective and safe schools through empowering and holding accountable head teachers;

- *Community participation:* Parents and the community support and are engaged in their schools through dialogue and partnership with UNRWA;

- *Child wellbeing:* The child's cognitive, emotional, physical and psychological welfare are nurtured and supported.

Debates in Civil Society around Improving Education Quality

As previously mentioned, the military closure of schools and universities during the First Intifada led to the development of a progressive movement of Palestinian teachers and educationalists in the 1980s and early 1990s who not only wanted to provide an alternative education in response to the closure of the formal system, but also began to question traditional modes of teaching and learning.[267] This is reflected in the strength

of civil society organizations working on education today, and the level of debate within civil society about issues around quality, pedagogy and teaching methodologies.

For example, organizations such as the Tamer Institute for Community Education organize well-supported activities such as a young writers group, which produces a monthly supplement in the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Ayyam*, as well as Tamer's longstanding libraries and reading workshops in schools and community centers around the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the Qattan Center for Education Research focuses on teachers' experiences in the system, encouraging them to do their own reflective research to explore the different issues and barriers they face in the educational process and share these in monthly newsletters and annual conferences. The center is also setting up a new learning "retreat" for teachers in Amman, Jordan, to encourage more creative and participatory teaching methods. The Teacher Creativity Center is focused on teachers, but is moving away from providing teacher training programs to doing more advocacy work around education policy, civic education and activating PTAs.[268]

The education departments in universities are also talking about the need for more participatory teaching methodologies to facilitate critical thinking in students, as well as achieving better examination results. A number of interviewees pointed to the potential role of the universities in this process, through a coordinated effort to strengthen university education departments and develop more innovative and effective teacher training programs.[269]

Others went further, believing that declining standards at school level were interacting with declining standards at university level. Students enter into university with limited training for independent thinking and research, coupled with declining standards among faculty members due to their long-term isolation from the international academic and research community and limited opportunities for doctoral study.[270] One faculty member suggested the need for an "intensive induction program" aimed at all students entering the university, to provide intensive skills training in how to read a text critically, how to pursue independent research in the library and use online journals, and the importance of debating issues and developing new ways of thinking.[271] As another senior faculty member said, "We need to be producers of knowledge not consumers of knowledge. At the moment, it's all just about absorbing information."[272]

Small but Growing Private Sector

The private education sector in Palestine is longstanding but comparatively small, accounting for around 8 percent of all schools. According to some, however, the

number of private schools with religious affiliation is increasing, perhaps indicating the beginning of a similar trend to that which has taken hold in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. This growth is felt to be the result of concerns about declining quality of education in public schools and also the growing role of religion in Palestinian society.[273] In East Jerusalem, the private education sector is significantly bigger than in the West Bank, and there are particular concerns that students are being pushed toward private schools because of the overcrowding and degradation of public schools.

8.6 Inequalities in Education and Exclusion of Children with Disabilities

Inequality in education is not as stark in Palestine as it is in some of the other countries in this study. Partly due to high enrollment rates, gender parity right up to tertiary level, and a small private sector in education, issues around inequality and concepts of inclusive education are rarely talked about. Declining quality affects all students, not just a minority, and the barriers to education under occupation also don't discriminate in terms of rich and poor, urban and rural or boys and girls. Nevertheless, inequalities in Palestinian education do exist and it is important that these are highlighted, not least because they are often neglected areas in strategies for education development.

Regional Disparities

As discussed, there is a widening gap in education resources and outcomes between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, due to the ongoing Israeli blockade, isolation by the international community and the Palestinian administrative division between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There are also declining standards in East Jerusalem, due to the unique pressures placed on the education system there. For example, Israel's restrictions on Palestinian building construction in East Jerusalem have had a knock-on effect on school infrastructure and maintenance of school buildings. The complex array of education authorities in Jerusalem—Israeli, Palestinian Authority, UNRWA, the Waqf, and private-run schools—has also led to a breakdown in education provision. According to recent figures, some 5,500 children in East Jerusalem (just over 5 percent) appear not to be enrolled in school at all.[274] One UN official highlighted the fact that while curfews and heavy fighting between the Israeli army and Palestinian militants in the north West Bank certainly impacted on examination results in,

for example, schools in Jenin and Balata refugee camps, the worst examination results actually came from the boys' school in Shu'fat camp on the outskirts of East Jerusalem.[275]

Exclusion of Disabled Students from Mainstream Education

There are so many organizations working in the development arena in Palestine that it can appear to be a "crowded field." This is true to some extent for education, particularly on issues relating to improving infrastructure, quality and teacher training. One area that is distinctly under-resourced, however, is education for disabled children. There are few appropriate teaching materials and schools lack the resources and expertise to integrate disabled children. While there is an official policy for integrating disabled students in mainstream education, most schools don't do it, or if they do, the children are unsupported and neglected.[276]

One interviewee, a trained special needs teacher, has transformed a primary school in Ramallah by adapting school materials, training her colleagues and inviting student teachers to volunteer at the school as extra support. She is also committed to sharing these resources more widely, and has plans for a website to share Arabic materials across the region. She is inundated by requests for help from parents both inside and outside the school. Below is an excerpt from the interview that captures her analysis:

> Inclusive education is a process; establishing the concept of "inclusion" is just the first step. People still think in terms of a "center" for disabled children; we've got to move away from pulling children out of the system. I've worked for 15 years at this School, and slowly, bit by bit, we developed our learning support resource library at the school. Our approach is based on assessing the needs of kids in the school, whether autism, cerebral palsy, speech delay, dyslexia, or other types of needs—this is the kind of diversity you would expect in any school. We have a policy to open the doors to every child and we find new ways to address their needs in the school. The second question is: Do we have the right support in the classroom? There is a lack of ready-made materials in Arabic, so we need to modify resources to make them accessible for use by the whole class. We've found that these accessible teaching materials are also enriching for other students in the classroom, not just those with special needs.[277]

8.7 The Diminishing Role of Civic Education

In the early development stages of the Palestinian national curriculum in the late 1990s, the role of civic education was regarded as high priority. A number of interviewees talked about its declining importance over the past few years, and pointed to three clear factors in this process of de-prioritization. For example, one of the authors of the civic education textbooks explained that this "marginalization of civic education" had started with the election of Hamas to the Palestinian Authority in 2006 and the appointment of a Hamas-affiliated Minister of Education. "There were attempts to re-do my book, which had received criticism from Islamic organizations, particularly in relation to its discussion of the right to freedom of religious association."[278]

The same interviewee also made clear that the context of the Second Intifada and rapidly declining political, economic and security situation for Palestinians over the past eight years has done nothing to reinforce public faith in civic and democratic values. She gave me an example of a news story a while back of a group of school children in Gaza who staged a protest against the collective punishment being imposed on the population of the Gaza Strip, by "tearing up their civic education books in front of the cameras as a way of saying that their reality does not bear any relation to what they are learning about in the books ... Where is their democracy? Where is their freedom? It does not exist."[279]

A third reason for the declining role of civic education was put forward by the director of a Palestinian NGO, who explained that there is very little training for teachers in civic education and consequently no teacher of civic education is specialized in the subject. He recalled that before 2005 there used to be a "free class" assigned to civic education, which was intended for active learning time, such as school trips to visit the Palestinian Legislative Council. There is now one civic education class every two weeks, while the "free class" has been reassigned to religious education, making the total time for religious education four classes per week.[280] Furthermore, he pointed out that students inevitably pick up on the fact that the subject is not valued and, consequently, they spend very little time studying for it.

8.8 Opportunities and Challenges for Education Reform

Government

It has been a difficult few years for the Palestinian Authority, and in particular for the Ministry of Education, due to the repercussions of the election of Hamas in January 2006—first resulting in a two-year international freeze on funding and then the administrative split between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There is a perception among civil society that in this context of internal strife, the Ministry has become more closed and conservative, despite the introduction of seemingly progressive strategies for education development and teacher education. However, there is a clear commitment within the Ministry to improving the quality of education, and good cooperation with international partners.

At the time of writing, at the end of 2009, the respective ministries of Education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are barely cooperating, with the exception of arranging for teacher salaries and the Tawjihi exams. There was a general view among interviewees that the Gaza Strip is facing an acute crisis in education on different levels.

Civil Society

There appears to be an increased appetite to do more advocacy work to influence PA policies on education, where previously the focus was on providing training for teachers or alternative education for children. It is also significant that the director of one Palestinian NGO is taking a leading role in the development of the region-wide Global Campaign for Education, ACEA (Arab Campaign for Education for All).

However, among prominent educationalists who were at the forefront of a progressive movement in Palestinian education in the 1980s and 1990s, there is still a sense of disillusionment and "lost opportunity" in relation to the development of the national education system.[281] References are made to a "clash of vision" between progressive ideas for the transformation of Palestinian education, and more conservative, traditionalist values within the PA. This dynamic between civil society and the PA to some extent still continues. For example, one interviewee felt that

> Although the Ministry talks about involving civil society, in reality it is much more closed. Last year there was a meeting between civil society organizations

and the Ministry—the whole idea was to open up both sides. But the partnership principles which were agreed need a lot more work to make them happen.[282]

Finally, in the context of an unstable political situation, and what many see as the "co-option" of civil society by international donor agendas,[283] it is important that international organizations are sensitized to supporting the regeneration of rooted civil society activism on education, rather than pursuing their own, often rather generic, solutions.

9. Widening Inequalities in Education[284]

9.1 Introduction and Background to Education in Syria

Syria is a republic by constitution, and all basic rights of citizens are guaranteed by this constitution. However, the state of emergency, which has been in force since 1963 under the martial law, confers unlimited power on the state.[285] In 2000, Syria saw a major change with the death of the political leader Hafez Al-Asad. Al-Asad ruled Syria for 30 years by building a centralized and regimented structure which allowed him to stay in power, on the one hand, and to keep in check the decentralizing forces of a people with different religions, ethnicities, tribal and land ties, on the other hand.[286] When his son, Bashar Al-Asad, took power, Syrians and the international community alike had great expectations for change.[287] Reform in every field was immediately advocated by the new president, but initial expressions of freedom and democratic critique (during a short period of time called the "Damascus Spring"), were soon repressed. At the same time, however, Syria is anxious to catch up with "modernization," globalization and technology in all fields and particularly in relation to education. In the spirit of modernization, for example, mobile phones were permitted and introduced into the country in 2000; the internet was made available to citizens and, although censorship is still widespread, the internet has increasingly become a way for people to receive information from sources other than the state-controlled newspapers. International television channels were allowed in 2000, mainly through the use of satellite dishes. This has given people the opportunity to be informed through not only the two government television channels but also regional and international ones. At the local level, it is still the case that some news is generally censored by the government press/media.

Education has historically played an important role in the Syrian regime. Both Hafez Al-Asad and the Baath Party (the ruling and only permitted party, of which the President is the General Secretary), and now the President's son, Bashar Al-Asad, consider education as a means for nation-building and for gaining the loyalty of the youth and future citizens of the state. The 1972 Syrian Constitution states this clearly:

> The educational and cultural system aims at creating a socialist nationalist Arab generation which is scientifically minded and attached to its history and land, proud of its heritage, and filled with the spirit of struggle to achieve its nation's objectives of unity, freedom, and socialism, and to serve humanity and its progress ... The nationalist socialist education is the basis for building the unified socialist Arab society. It seeks to strengthen moral values, to achieve the higher ideals of the Arab nation, to develop the society, and to serve the causes of humanity.[288]

Education, in other words, "is part of the government's larger strategy of nation-building"[289] and therefore politically charged, strongly centralized and controlled by the state. Loyalty to the latter is openly sought through the constant presence of photos of the President and the Baath Party flag in schools. In addition, students sing the national anthem every morning and praise the Baath Party and the unity of the Arab community before entering the classroom.

National Education System

The school system in Syria is comprised of three years of non-compulsory pre-primary education; basic education (divided into a primary level from first to sixth grade and a lower secondary level from seventh to ninth grade) and secondary education (up to twelfth grade). Since 1981, basic education has been compulsory and free for all Syrian citizens and "those like them" (this refers in particular to the Palestinian refugees). In 2002, basic education was extended to grade 9, thereby making education compulsory through to that level. The "general" secondary level is divided into a "literary" branch (*adaby*) and a "scientific" branch (*a'lmi*), while vocational education and training (TVET) is divided into commercial, industrial, agricultural and handicraft branches. Enrollment in the public university is based on achievement in the secondary school leaving exam, known as *bakaloria*. The best grades open the door to the faculties of Engineering and Medicine, while lower grades allow for enrollment in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Because socio-economic background strongly affects

academic performance and because university entrance is based on grades achieved at secondary level, there seems to be little room for socio-economic mobility.

In addition, only the top 2 percent of those who attend TVET can re-enter the formal system by enrolling in technical faculties at university. Those who do not achieve high grades in the secondary level leaving exam and who still want to pursue higher studies in Engineering or Medicine can either enroll in private universities (a very recent phenomenon in Syria) or try to enter the so-called "parallel system" (*mwazi*), which means enrolling at the public university and paying tuition fees (while, in general, public university is free of charge).

The curriculum for all levels of education is centrally developed and subjects such as civic education (*al-tarbia al-qawmyya*), in particular, are politically and ideologically loaded. Although proclaiming a process of continuous reform, the curriculum does not seem to have made any considerable changes over time.[290] Outmoded teaching practices, including rote memorization, seem to be strongly related to the content and structure of textbooks themselves, which contain exercises that can be solved only through lesson memorization.[291]

As far as gender representation is concerned, although a critical analysis of textbooks is beyond the scope of this study, it can be said that, at least theoretically, the Baath Party and therefore the Higher Committee for Curricular Development promote a modern vision of women and their active role in society. However, achieving equality between men and women seems to be realized through making women more like men rather than in valuing differences. For example, the "trousered unisex … school uniform" has been interpreted as a sign of equality between men and women,[292] but also as a desire to "transform" women into men. However, when the curricula are reviewed from a gender perspective, the focus is usually on ensuring that pictures do not represent only women in the household domain, while more subtle stereotypes and messages conveyed through the textbooks are often ignored.

9.2 Widening Regional Disparities Reflected in Education

Syria is a vast country. Among the most densely inhabited cities are Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous and Daraa, while the rest of the country is sparsely inhabited. Although the official rhetoric emphasizes the provision of services to *all* the country, the quality of services provided in remote areas is undoubtedly lower than in urban areas. A particularly neglected area is the northeast of Syria, from Deir Ez-Zor

to Qamishli. Although the government seems particularly interested in promoting economic growth and development in these areas, this vast region of Syria does not receive as much investment as other areas of the country. Although the government might wish to attract international funding to this region and therefore welcome any program taking place there, in fact, it discourages foreign presence because of the increased security requirements in this area which borders with Iraq and is therefore an easy target for illegal immigration. Furthermore, it also represents a numerous Kurdish population subject to several State abuses, which the government tends to conceal from international eyes.

The northeast of the country, namely the governorates of Hassake and Deir Ez-zur, have been dramatically affected by a drought which started in 2005. Recent government and international organizations' interventions have not been able to substantially reduce the great agricultural losses. The drought has completely changed the lives of families living in those areas. Many families who had always worked on the fertile land of the Euphrates valley had to leave their houses to search for work opportunities elsewhere. Many of them went to the outskirts of big cities, where they now live in makeshift tents.[293] Children in these areas are the most vulnerable to drop-out, because even if they are initially enrolled in nearby schools, they are often unable to continue their schooling because their families cannot afford the direct and indirect costs of education. These children may also be subjected to discrimination by their classmates and teachers because of their appearance and obvious cultural backgrounds that identify them as *fellahin* (farmers) or Bedouin (nomadic tribes).

A UN agency[294] is providing support to the northeast region of Syria through a school feeding scheme. They provide food to children who attend school for 80 percent of the academic year. Food is delivered to the families and not directly in the schools, so that families in which children work in herding or agriculture can support their children's attendance at school (because the whole family benefits from the food rations). While drop-out is increasing in the region as families move out to other areas of the country in search of work, the Food for Education program has substantially impacted the retention rate of those children who were most likely to drop out because of economic conditions. In addition, in the same region, many schools have been closed due to lack of students (because their families have moved), and only schools where the Food for Education programs operate are still open. The WFP is also implementing a similar scheme for women attending literacy courses, which are nationally organized at a basic level of six months and a post-literacy level of three months. These women receive food for their attendance, and in the post-literacy course they

are trained on how to manage small businesses. The government sometimes provides small credits to these women to start their own enterprises.

The huge socio-economic disparities present among the different regions of Syria are not only mirrored in the quantity of educational services provided in the different areas but also and more importantly in the quality of education provided. In a recent visit of UNICEF's executive director to the president of Syria, Bashar Al-Asad, the latter recognized the need to focus on children and young people *all over* the country and to provide them with high-quality education. In other words, it was recognized that it is not enough to increase the quantity of educational services; improvements are made by improving the quality of provision.

9.3 Education Quality and the Role of Non-formal Education

That government policies have aimed to ensure school access to all children was emphasized by many of the interviewees.[295] Data from one of the most recent reports on primary education records a 98 percent net enrollment rate for 2004.[296] Although this percentage is high, it has been widely recognized that statistics cannot capture the complexity of what goes on in the classroom and the need to intervene to improve the quality of education provided at all levels.[297] In particular, the 2005 UNDP report presents a rather gloomy picture of education in Syria. It highlights the need for education reforms at all levels in order to tackle authoritarian teaching methods, rote learning, and valuing memorization over critical thinking and ownership of knowledge. Furthermore, it underlines the disparities between urban and rural areas, persistent gender inequalities (particularly in those fields deemed culturally inappropriate to women) and the small budget allocations to education.

In a highly centralized policy context, non-formal education, i.e. the learning that takes place outside the school environment, is one of the few spaces for civil society organizations to address (albeit indirectly) some of the core issues related to equity and quality of education. Many interviewees mentioned that more direct means of intervention in the quality of education are often off-limits to both national and international organizations. However, this is not always the case. UNICEF, for example, has been working with the MoE on the implementation of Child Friendly Schools.[298] They have trained teachers in how to create a child-friendly environment in schools and also had discussions with the MoE about establishing PTAs, which are officially

included in national school regulations, but are not established in practice. Child-friendly schools are particularly promoted in areas where the presence of Iraqi refugees is high, as well as other more marginalized areas such as in the northeast of the country. The aim of UNICEF is to mainstream Child Friendly Schools through teacher training and to play a role in the Education faculty of the University of Damascus. UNICEF is working in close collaboration with UNESCO (from its regional offices in Beirut and Amman), with a focus on active learning and child-centered approaches.

Besides UNICEF, the Syrian Trust for Development,[299] a national non-profit organization chaired by the First Lady, is also working at different levels to improve the quality of education in Syria. The Syrian Trust is an umbrella for five independent programs: Firdos, Massar, Shabab, Rawafed, and a research division. Whilst Firdos focuses particularly on rural and women's development, Massar and Shabab have an education/learning focus. Massar[300] in particular focuses on children and young people's learning through its Discovery Center in Latakia and the forthcoming one in Damascus. They reach out to all the governorates with a touring program through which they promote active learning and youth empowerment through knowledge. Shabab targets an older audience (young people from 15 to 24 years old) and focuses on the business skills and knowledge necessary for young people to enter the labor market. The Syrian Trust for Development's programs run parallel to those of the MoE. Young people are graduating from the national education system without the necessary skills for opening private businesses or the capacity to acquire further knowledge. Massar's vision is that young people make up the bulk of the Syrian population and it is in them that the government should invest.

Massar, focusing on a very early stage, aims to provide children with the skills to become independent active learners and to reconnect learning with school education. It also promotes civic education through the active participation of children and young people in their community. By contrast, with the formal civic education (*al-tarbya al qawmya*) taught in the school from grade 1 to the last year of university, the Syrian Trust for Development understands civic education to be the active participation of children and young people in their communities.[301] A similar concept of civic education is held by the Baath Party organizations for students: the Pioneers and the Shabibe at-thawra.

9.4 Increasing Inequality in Access to Higher Education and Persisting Inequality in Access to ECCE Provision

Public–Private Partnerships

The underpinning philosophy of the state in Syria, enshrined in its constitution, is that the state is the guarantor of social equity for its citizens. This is why the country has always strived for what it calls "democratic education," "linking it to comprehensive development, and situating it within the reach of all, males and females."[302] Nevertheless, the latest five-year plan[303] promotes a vision of Syria in which the state has a less centralized role. Leaning toward a more neo-liberal framework, partnership with the private sector and civil society organizations is advocated in order to enlarge the basis of those providing services to citizens (i.e. not only the state). Within this framework and highlighting the emphasis placed on private initiatives for the provision of services for the community, Law No. 160 of 1958, which regulates private education, has recently been amended to allow an enhanced role for private organizations in the provision of early childhood education and care.[304]

With the same aim, a law was passed in 2001 to allow, for the first time in Syria, private provision of education at university level. The reasoning behind these initiatives is that a decrease in the pressure on public services will allow their quality to improve. Whilst it is still too early to say how private universities are impacting on the quality of public universities, the high cost of the first—and their perceived better quality, mainly measured by the language of instruction (English), better infrastructure, equipment and student—teacher ratios—are quite likely to accentuate inequalities between those who can afford them and those who cannot. Meanwhile, the reality is that the same teachers often teach in both the public and private universities, with some questioning the rationale of paying for the same tuition that is available in the public sector.[305]

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

As far as ECCE is concerned, the EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2009 reports that in Syria "the attendance rate for the wealthiest 20 percent is five times the level for the poorest 20 percent."[306] In other words, because public provision of ECCE is not adequate to ensure access for all (interviewees reported that present provision covers only 13 percent of children, while the Syrian government and UNICEF[307] report even

less), private provision is exacerbating disparities among those who can afford private kindergartens and those who cannot. On the one hand, this arguably has a bearing on children's development in the early years, how they perform at school afterwards and their overall completion rates. On the other hand, it also has a bearing on the likelihood of their mothers being able to enter or re-enter the labor market after the birth of their child. Particularly in urban settings, where extended families are no longer the norm, the lack of safe and affordable daycare means that mothers usually stay at home, thus postponing or preventing their re-entry into the labor market.[308]

One interviewee argued that kindergarten education tends to be little more than teaching students what they will learn in the first grades of basic education, whilst other education dimensions are often neglected.[309] There is also a need to address the issue of transition from kindergartens to the first, second, third and fourth grades. The government's willingness to work on issues related to ECCE provision is expressed at many levels and substantiated by the foundation of the Commission for Family Affairs and the establishment of a new Center for Early Childhood. The first is a governmental commission dealing with issues relating to women and children, and the second is a center (opened in September 2009) where there is a pilot kindergarten, a training and research center and a library for children. However, the Commission for Family Affairs in collaboration with UNICEF launched a report in August 2009 on the state of Syrian children in 2008[310] saying that the slow progress of the country in providing ECCE was a risk factor for the situation of children and families.

9.5 Exclusion of Children with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties

Since 2000, the Syrian government has demonstrated a keen interest in issues concerning disability, as evidenced by the personal involvement of members of the presidential family (namely the First Lady) in the promotion of disabled people's rights and care. As mentioned above, in 2004, primary education net enrollment was as high as 98 percent, and the (GMR) 2008 records UPE as having been achieved.[311] However, this data tells us nothing about the situation of disabled children, because "there is no indicator" in the EFA GMR "for enrollment, drop-out, or attainment of disabled children."[312] In 2004, Law No. 34 on disability was issued.[313] A disabled person is defined as:

a person who is unable to accomplish for himself and by himself the necessi-

ties of the *normal* private and social life either completely or partially due to a congenital defect or to an acquired one with regards to his physical and mental abilities.[314]

The definition emphasizes the physical over the social aspects of disability, and follows a medical approach which locates disability within the person and does not acknowledge external disabling factors. The law, while enforcing decisions related to health, rehabilitation and employment issues, ensures "basic education for *physically* disabled school-age children whether by means of the formal schools or institutes." It is worth noting that while "physically disabled children" can be educated either in regular or specialized schools, there is no mention in the law about who should choose at which school they are to be educated, or according to what criteria this choice should be made. Therefore, as emerged through the interviews, the choice is often left to the head teacher and also depends on whether the family can take care of transport and other issues related to access to school premises. Furthermore, because "mentally disabled" children are not mentioned, it is presumed that such children are to be educated *only* in special institutes.

In 2007, AAMAL, a national NGO chaired by the First Lady, started working on a plan for the care and rehabilitation of disabled people.[315] In 2008, this plan was adopted by the government as the National Plan for the Care and Rehabilitation of Disabled People. It explicitly says that the understanding of disability has developed through progressive phases: from traditional conceptions of disability as inherently negative, through the medical interpretation first and then the social interpretation, to the current development approach to disability. What is termed as the development approach to disability advocates the full participation of people with disabilities in society in its social, educational and economic activities. The stated objective of the national plan is, in fact, the use of disabled people's potential for the sustainable development of Syria through their participation and added value to society. To achieve this, particular emphasis is given to the need for more precise statistics about the number of disabled people, their cost to the state, and the promotion of their employment through vocational training. Education (both in regular and special schools) and employment are promoted as the means to achieve disabled people's participation in society.

Currently, integration into regular schooling can only take place for "mild" cases of disability, i.e. after they have been "rehabilitated." In the current practice, many children attend special education for a certain amount of time until they can go back to regular school. This approach, although common in many countries of the world,

clearly shows how inclusive education is considered as the "regularization" of children, rather than a real radical change within the education system to cater for the diversity of needs of all children. Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs together with special needs centers under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MoSAL) often receive children with the most severe disabilities. The government adopted these programs in 2002 (previously only NGOs had operated CBR projects). The division of competency between the MoE and the MoSAL tends to relegate children with disabilities to the sphere of care (provided by the MoSAL) rather than the sphere of education (ideally, provided by the MoE). The quality and the relevance of the education that children get in special needs centers is a highly disputed issue.

After adopting the principles of the Salamanca Statement, the MoE extensively collaborated with UNESCO, among other organizations, for the implementation of inclusive education. In theory, inclusive education in Syria is understood as:

> a set of intended processes that enable the educational system to absorb all the targeted subjects within its services, so dealing with the issue of those threatened by being excluded or being apart from its field of activities regardless of race, religion, nationality, color, class, gender and disability.[316]

In practice, inclusive education is mainly understood as education for disabled children, with the exception of touring schools catering for Bedouin children.[317] In 2003, a two-year pilot project was implemented in collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF, Save the Children UK, Save the Children Sweden and an international NGO working in the field of disability in the Middle East to promote the integration of disabled students into five schools. The project led to the establishment of a National Committee for Inclusion in the MoE and included a component of teacher training, advocacy seminars and the elaboration of a Syrian engineering code for the rehabilitation of schools in order to eliminate infrastructural barriers. Furthermore, adult literacy programs were established to promote the inclusion into society of marginalized adult disabled people. However, an interviewee admitted that, since the pilot projects ended, there has been little or no progress on that front.[318]

It is worth noting here that besides inclusive education projects, the MoE has established, and/or pledged to establish, new specialized centers for the segregated education of disabled and talented students. Mittler[319] holds that speaking of special education (and the same applies to the segregated provision of education for talented students) when we are striving for schools responding to student needs is not only

anachronistic but also indicative of a mindset that is not changing. The idea that disabled children need "special" education or that talented children must attend privileged schools is part of a broader discourse related to the role of education in society and whether it strives for equal opportunities for all or reproduces inequalities present in society at large.

9.6 Discrimination Against Refugees and "Non-citizens"

Exclusion of Iraqi Refugees

Following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and particularly due to the sectarian violence that resulted (with its climax in 2006), more than 4 million Iraqis were either internally displaced or fled the country seeking refuge elsewhere. It is estimated that Syria received 1.5 million Iraqis and that of those, 500,000 are children of school age.[320] Although basic education in Syria is provided free of charge for Syrians and foreigners, and Iraqi children have been given access to Syrian schools, the Syrian MoE reported that only 32,425 Iraqi children were attending school in 2007—2008.[321] While the Iraqi refugees are considered refugees *prima facie* by UNHCR, only a small percentage of them are registered and they are not legally considered refugees by the Syrian government, which has not signed the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees nor the 1967 Protocol. As such, the government officially considers them as "guests,"[322] despite its *de facto* acceptance of UNHCR's designation of Iraqis as refugees.[323]

As a group, Iraqis were allowed entry to Syria on the basis of "Arab brotherhood," which was particularly emphasized by the presence of a common external imperial threat.[324] However, to what rights this "brotherhood" entitled the refugees is not clear, and when their high numbers heavily impacted the social services and the already limited resources available to the country, the Syrian government applied entrance restrictions to refugees and on the services that they could freely access.[325] Syria had a highly subsidized economy until 2006, and the increase in demand from more than 1 million people meant that the government had to bear huge costs. This coincided with the most acute drought of the last 40 years, and the increase in oil prices led to many subsidies on consumables being lifted, causing an increase in prices which affected the population as a whole.[326]

While the impact of the Iraqi refugees on the economy has not been entirely negative, it is perceived as such by most Syrians, and this, together with other factors, is causing increased discrimination against Iraqi refugees in Syria. Iraqi refugees are actively excluded from the labor market as they are not allowed to work legally. This means that they have to rely on savings, cash transfers from relatives in Iraq, or the informal sector. While the first refugees who settled in Syria in 2003 tended to be more wealthy Sunni Iraqis, the majority of those who fled afterwards were mainly from middle and lower classes. Their exclusion from the labor market is, therefore, impoverishing wealthier families while rendering the situation extremely difficult for the others. The inability to work legally makes Syria a temporary settlement destination, although not necessarily a short-term one, as the situation of other refugees in the Middle East, not least the Palestinian refugees, has shown. Nevertheless, the majority of Iraqis in Syria interviewed by UNICEF want to resettle in a third country.[327] Meanwhile, UNHCR managed to obtain a resettlement plan for 20,000 Iraqis in the Middle East in 2007, which covers only 1 percent of the Iraqi refugee population in the region.[328] As a result of increasing poverty, due to lack of employment coupled with hopes of resettlement to a third country, large numbers of Iraqi children are missing out on an education. Many families who do not want to take up illegal work cannot afford the direct and indirect costs of schooling. The situation is further exacerbated by family members' illness or disability caused by the conflict and/or the loss of breadwinners. This often leads to children having to take up illegal and sometimes exploitative work to sustain their families, potentially involving long hours for as little as one or two dollars a day.[329]

Despite the pledge at the Dakar Conference for EFA that "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by lack of resources,"[330] together with its emphasis on the importance of education in emergencies, the joint appeal of UNICEF and UNHCR to the international community for increased funding has received scarce attention. Moreover, while the Syrian government spends on average US$611 per student per year, Amnesty International[331] mentions that officials from the government report the spending on each Iraqi student to be just half that amount, US$300 per year, although other sources suggest different amounts. Average classrooms in Syria have a student—teacher ratio of 22—25:1, while schools in areas with major concentrations of Iraqi refugees have reached a ratio of 60:1. These figures affect the quality of education and ultimately the retention of students. Furthermore, while recourse to double shifts may partly overcome the lack of adequate space, in some periods of the year, the hot weather does not easily allow for afternoon classes.

Perceptions around low relevance of the curriculum are exacerbating the situation, and significant numbers of Iraqi children do not consider going to school as useful, preferring instead to earn a living to help support their families. Discrimination against Iraqi children by teachers, peers and school principals was also reported by interviewees, along with low grade progression for some children, further contributing to drop-out rates. Remedial classes and extra support are provided by some international NGOs, such as the Danish Refugee Council, Enfants du Monde and the International Rescue Committee.

9.7 Education for Palestinian Refugees and Their "Integration"

In Syria there are 13 official UNRWA refugee camps and some "unofficial" camps, where the UNRWA services are sparser. UNRWA provides basic social, education and health services to the Palestinian refugee population. There is a perception among people and interviewees that UNRWA education is of higher quality than mainstream Syrian education, although measuring the quality of education is narrowly limited to the achievement levels of students. UNRWA follows the same curriculum as the host country, and Palestinian students seem to have better results than their Syrian peers. Although this is perceived as being due to a higher quality of education, UNRWA schools suffer from chronically overcrowded classrooms and therefore have to adopt double-shift systems. They also lack financial resources, which results in rundown and unsafe school infrastructures, and school violence.

Whilst UNRWA provides basic education to Palestinian refugees, in terms of secondary and higher education, refugees are considered as Syrian nationals and can access these levels of education free of charge. However, the transition from basic education to secondary education is not smooth, and only a low percentage of students continue to secondary and higher education.[332] A senior official at UNRWA pointed out that the high drop-out rate among Palestinian refugees at the secondary level is indirectly shown by the fact that, increasingly, UNRWA schools have had to recruit Syrian teachers, because they do not have sufficient numbers of trained Palestinian teachers.[333]

Although no studies address the specific reasons for this high level of drop-out in the transition from basic to secondary education, possible factors include becoming a minority in mainstream public schools, combined with low socioeconomic circumstances among many Palestinian refugees. One interviewee, himself a young Pales-

tinian refugee, suggested that it is in secondary school that the Palestinian refugee understands what it is to be a refugee, when he or she encounters the majority of students who are different and speak with a different accent. "It is through the negation of the Syrian identity that the Palestinian refugees keep their identity."[334]

Forced Arabization of Kurds

The Kurdish population is the second largest ethnic group in Syria. In contrast to other ethnic minorities (such as, for example, the Armenians) they are not allowed to open their own schools and their culture and language are not recognized by the Syrian government. In Syria, there are primarily two groups of Kurds: a group in the region around Aleppo (in the area of Afrin), generally with Syrian nationality; and a group in the northeast region, the majority of whom were deprived of Syrian nationality during a census in 1962. At that time, 20 percent of the Kurdish population was made stateless and "invisible." This has been interpreted as the forced Arabization of the northeast region, which is rich in oil and other resources—and thus has always been of national value—but which is also densely populated by a non-Arab ethnic group. These stateless citizens[335] (referred to in Arabic as the *ajaneb*, the foreigners) do not have basic legal rights, including the rights to work, own property, or to leave the country (due to the absence of travel documents). Although the government recognizes the right of the stateless Kurds to basic education, there are still major inequality gaps. Progression to secondary and tertiary education, for example, is more or less impossible, as are scholarships to study abroad.[336] Furthermore, it is a highly sensitive issue, and was rarely raised during the interviews conducted for this study. As Rachel Bernu[337] puts it:

> The Arabization of the Kurdish regions that began in Syria in the early 1960s also continues to operate today. This forced assimilation of Kurds into Arab society means a severe ban on the use of Kurdish language and the restriction of the group's expression of its cultural identity.

9.8 Opportunities and Challenges for Education Reform

Government

Education has always been a priority of the Syrian government. The Baath Party has strived to provide citizens with equal access to education and health services, although questions of quality have tended to be less prioritized. Until recently, the education sector was totally funded by the government, but rapid population growth and a large proportion of young people have strained the state's resources. After 2000, following a more liberal approach initiated by the previous president, the new president has increasingly appealed to the private sector as a possible ally of the state, which cannot any longer provide for everyone. Private education is a very new sector in Syria and there is still suspicion around it, including within the MoE. Although embracing the discourses of decentralization, the government is still very much a centralized entity, and decision making takes place mainly at high levels. While the MoE implements policies coming from above, little room for action is left to the schools.

Civil Society

Given the highly centralized nature of education in Syria, the involvement of civil society has not been as strong as in other Arab countries. Especially in the past, civil society organizations supported the government through the provision of education or care to those who were not included in regular education, such as disabled children or orphans. However, civil society organizations could not (and still cannot) interfere with issues related to the curriculum, nor could they advocate for improved access to mainstream education. Civil society organizations are active in adult literacy provision and those sectors of education that the state does not see as threatening, such as temporary programs on environment education, personal hygiene and health.

However, in the last 10 years, and particularly after 2004, there has been a proliferation of national civil society organizations and the arrival of international organizations. As in other countries, two streams of civil society organizations can be identified: traditional charity associations and development organizations. While traditional charities have always existed in the country and mainly provided services for the "poorest of the poor" by distributing medicines and helping disabled children, orphans and women, development organizations have a different configuration. They define themselves as NGOs and are staffed by professionals who speak English and

are fluent in development jargon. Despite their seeming independence and emphasis on being "non-governmental," these organizations need to undergo several security checks, are regulated by very old laws and need to be registered with the MoSAL. Once they are licensed, they need to provide the MoSAL with monthly reports on their activities and financial reports, while international funding requires prior written approval from the Ministry. Furthermore, national civil society organizations are not allowed to communicate directly with the foreign embassies present in the country.

The presidential family has promoted and tried to encourage civil society organizations with the proviso that they do not interfere in political affairs. The First Lady, in particular, is chairing several NGOs which often seem to run a parallel system to that of the ministries (AAMAL for disability issues, for example, MASSAR for learning, and SHABAB for employment issues, etc.). While Palestinian civil society organizations are tolerated on the condition that they do not act as a cover for political organizations, Iraqi civil society organizations have been banned for security reasons.[338]

Before 1999, there were very few international organizations working in Syria (with the exception of UN agencies). After 2000, many international organizations started negotiations with the government to begin working in the country. So far, there is no formal framework for international organizations to register with the MoSAL or to be officially authorized to work. The lack of a legal framework for the work of international organizations was strongly brought to the fore after the war in Iraq in 2003, when numerous organizations tried to start working in Syria. The government was not ready to accept such a high presence of international organizations and many of them were denied entry.

10. Education Justice in the Middle East and North Africa: Conclusions

This scoping study is intended as a broad situational analysis of a number of education contexts in the Middle East. Rather than focusing on any specific issue in depth, its purpose is to highlight current views in the region in relation to education inequalities and the role of civil society in shaping education change. On the basis of interviews with a range of stakeholders, including government ministries, civil society organizations and international agencies, we have identified a number of cross-regional themes emerging from the study, which are outlined in this concluding chapter. We also provide some further reflections on the role of "civil society" in the region and conclude with recommendations for the potential development of Open Society Foundations' "education justice" strategy.

10.1 Cross-regional Themes Emerging from the Study

A contextually specific approach is vital to developing an effective strategy for "education justice" that can address the various political, social, economic and administrative factors that are both driving and impeding inclusive access to quality education in the Middle East and North Africa. Given the specificities and sensitivities of different country contexts in the region, generalizations are to be avoided. Nevertheless, emerging from the country-specific analyses undertaken for this study, we have identified five cross-regional themes:

- Barriers to teaching and thinking critically;

- Inequalities in education and society;

- Impacts of privatization in education;

- Politics of education in conflict;

- Citizenship, activism, and the state.

Barriers to Teaching and Thinking Critically

Despite high enrollment levels across all five countries in the study, there are a number of key barriers to improving the quality of teaching and learning. First, there is still a heavy emphasis on "hardware" (infrastructure, facilities and equipment) in terms of understanding and improving education quality. For example, UNRWA in Lebanon is focused on building more schools with the aim that less crowded classrooms and reduced necessity for double shifts will increase teaching contact time and thus improve examination results.[339] However, there is also concern that examination-based indicators do not do justice to all the other challenges that are faced in classrooms in Palestinian refugee camps across Lebanon, such as school violence and lack of motivation among students in an extremely harsh economic and political environment. Responding to this, the Norwegian Refugee Council is working with UNRWA on a "Listening Schools Project," which focuses on participatory teaching methods, active learning, and supportive school environments, and is already getting positive feedback from teachers, students and parents in participating schools.[340]

"Critical thinking" is still a difficult concept in many countries, not least because it implies democratic principles that may be far from entrenched in the wider society. Even subjects such as civic education, which have the potential for introducing more interactive learning activities and debate among students, are largely reduced to receiving information about national laws and institutions. The lack of progress in teaching methods is also affecting standards at the higher education level in that students entering university are often not equipped to read critically, debate issues, or carry out independent research. Some Palestinian educationalists interviewed talked about "consuming knowledge" as opposed to "producing knowledge," and argued that this has to be addressed in the universities as well as at the school level, to shift the entire culture of learning.[341]

Traditionalist teaching methods extend to traditionalist modes of class discipline, and despite national laws against corporal punishment in some countries, teacher—student violence is very common. Violence in schools and violent environments emerged as a major issue in Egypt and to some extent in Jordan, Lebanon,

Palestine and Syria. In Egypt in 2008, the news that a fourth grade child had died as a result of violence inflicted by his teacher dramatically brought the problem of violence in schools to the fore. According to UNICEF, 50 percent of children in Upper Egypt and 70 percent of children in urban areas experience corporal punishment in school.[342] Violence in schools is linked to overcrowded classrooms, under-qualified and under-supported teachers, a lack of extracurricular activities for children and young people, and violent environments outside the school. Teachers often view corporal punishment as necessary given the conditions in which they have to teach, and public opinion tends to support this view, making it difficult to enforce bans.[343] For example, teachers in UNRWA schools in Lebanon are resisting the new "zero tolerance" policy on corporal punishment, arguing that they are now defenseless in the face of continuing student violence against them.[344] Meanwhile, UNICEF, Diakonia and Save the Children are involved in public campaigns against school violence in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Palestine.

In all five countries, there are serious weaknesses in teacher training. High numbers of teachers are not trained (in Lebanon as many as 80 percent[345]) due to a lack of coherent teacher education. For example, in most countries, teachers can walk straight into a teaching job with a bachelor's degree in any subject and no teacher training at all, while teaching diplomas are either non-existent or undervalued. In all the countries involved in this study, the wider devaluation of the teaching profession was highlighted as a key factor in declining education indicators. Teachers are poorly paid and are often women, as teaching is no longer seen as a suitable job for an educated man or one that offers a wage that can support a family. While the Palestinian Authority introduced a national teaching strategy last year to address some of these issues, most countries still approach teacher training in a piecemeal way, for example through NGO programs, rather than systemically through higher education institutions.

There is also a trend toward teachers on short contracts, referred to in some interviews as "daily wage" teachers, which was particularly noted in Egypt and Lebanon. UNDP is among those advocating for stronger in-service training at the school level, to meet the needs of all types of teachers, which cannot be met by the already over-burdened central system. In Egypt, this is being implemented through the creation of the Professional Academy for Teachers.[346]

Finally, although literacy rates have recently dramatically increased in the MENA region, due to the expansion of primary education, illiteracy nevertheless remains a pervasive issue both for adults—who did not benefit from the recently expanded edu-

cation system—and for young people, who are leaving primary education without the basic skills of reading and writing. Although there have been extensive government literacy campaigns in Syria and in Egypt in the past, with laws introduced to abolish illiteracy, the issue appears to have now dropped off the list of government priorities and is often left to NGOs. For example, Caritas in Egypt reaches out to young people and adults who did not attend school or who dropped out early. Their approach of promoting literacy, basic skills, human rights and piloting a peer education model is reminiscent of Freire's pedagogy of literacy as a means to empower oppressed groups.[347]

Inequalities in Education and Society

There are stark inequalities in all the education systems included in this study. These inequalities can be broadly linked to disability, religion/ethnicity, wealth, region/location, and gender, although they are clearly interactive and strongly reinforce broader socio-economic inequalities in the wider society. At the same time, there is a very narrow concept of inclusive education in all five countries in the study, wherein it is usually only understood in terms of "education for children with special needs." If MENA countries are to seriously tackle the educational inequalities that exist, then a more radical understanding of inclusive education is needed to address wider issues of discrimination. Ultimately, it becomes a political matter, and this is possibly why governments are still inclined to limit the focus of inclusive education to disabled children, as it avoids the issues that are more politically challenging. As outlined recently by Save the Children UK:

> Inclusive education is a process of enabling all children, including previously excluded groups, to learn and participate effectively within mainstream school systems. Inclusive education challenges exclusionary cultures, policies and practices in education, removing barriers to participation and learning, and acknowledging individual learners' needs and potential. There is substantial evidence that if education systems respond to and welcome the different characteristics and situations of all learners and their communities, there is a better chance of children entering, attending and staying in education.[348]

Disabled children across the region are largely excluded from school with some shocking statistics. For example, in Lebanon, over 60 percent of children registered with a disability are illiterate.[349] While disability movements are gaining influence

and profile in some countries, their focus on education tends to be limited to issues of accessibility rather than more holistic approaches to inclusive learning. For this reason, some interviewees warned against calling for "mainstreaming" of disabled children in education without first putting in place the necessary training and support mechanisms to make it work. We did meet some extremely committed specialists in this field, including one interviewee who has succeeded in transforming a primary school in Ramallah by producing inclusive education resources and training student teachers in the classroom, but these individuals and organizations are isolated and under-resourced, while the dominant thinking is still about separating disabled children by putting them in "special schools," if they are able to go to school at all.[350]

With regard to issues of religion and ethnicity in education, some countries in the region are more clearly divisive than others. For example, private education in Lebanon is openly divided along religious/ethnic lines, while "non-citizens" are largely excluded from mainstream education.

Regional disparities are also a persistent issue in many countries in the region. Upper Egypt and the northeast region of Syria, for example, are particularly disadvantaged areas where scarcity and poor quality of education services combine with other factors of vulnerability, such as poverty and marginalization. Relatively high disparities among governorates are also present in Jordan, where the Education Index of governorates such as Ma'an and Mafraq is relatively low compared to the national average. While decentralization is being increasingly promoted in Jordan and Syria as a potential solution to the issue of regional disparities, it is not always clear what is to be decentralized and to whom.

Some regional disparities are also due to imbalances in the interventions by international development actors. For example, south Lebanon has been heavily invested in over the past decade as part of post-war reconstruction programs, but this has contributed to skewed student—teacher ratios where the national average is one teacher for every nine students, while classrooms in the north and northeast of the country remain over-crowded and under-resourced. The politics of aid has also had a devastating impact on the Gaza Strip, where continuing blockade and international isolation is plunging the education system into disrepair and major inequalities are opening up in the education resources and outcomes between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Academic streaming is also prevalent in many countries in the region, and this has had a tendency to reinforce other types of inequalities in education, channeling children from poorer and marginalized groups into vocational training at an early age

and limiting their opportunities for a university education and better employment prospects. Yet vocational training remains high on the education development priorities of many countries, and this needs to be more carefully examined in the context of acute inequalities at the school level. Meanwhile, adult and continuing education is limited to addressing literacy and basic education, with very few opportunities for adults to pursue skills and training in new areas.

In relation to gender, there is near gender parity at the primary school level in all the countries in this study, and the gender gap is also closing at secondary school. In some countries, notably Palestine, female students account for more than 50 percent of the university student population. However, a simple analysis of enrollment masks deeper gender inequalities that still persist in education, as evidenced by drop-out due to early marriage, higher illiteracy levels among older women, and the fact that even a university education rarely translates into equal employment opportunities for women in the labor market.

Finally, while national and international organizations have played a significant role in encouraging governments to establish child protection policies and national councils to protect children's rights over the last decade, in countries such as Egypt, working and street children are very often excluded from education and only supported through the efforts of NGOs. In Egypt and Syria, street children may be arrested and kept in custody in juvenile centers for truancy or because they are seen as "vulnerable to risk," while in juvenile institutes children not only are deprived of any educational opportunity but are also at further risk of violence and abuse.[351]

Impacts of Privatization in Education

In a number of countries in this study, particularly Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt, increasing privatization in the education sector is playing a prominent role in widening inequalities in access to quality education. Political instability and neo-liberal economic agendas have conspired to undermine the public school system in a number of countries, so that in Lebanon, for example, it is already the case that "only poor children go to public schools."[352]

In contexts that are already burdened by acute societal divisions, the socio-economic and political implications of increasing privatization in education are potentially, and in some cases already, enormous. In Lebanon, for example, the majority (over 60 percent) of children go to private school until the age of 16. The vast majority of these private schools are religious-affiliated, and almost all the interviewees for this study talked about their fears that private education is exacerbating the deep confes-

sional divisions in Lebanese society and contributing to current and future instability. Interviewees in Egypt expressed similar concerns: because the Al-Azhar education system generally caters for the "poorest of the poor" (being cheaper than the public schools), and given its religious emphasis (they also enroll only Muslim students), there are fears that this parallel system may exacerbate potential or underlying conflicts between different religious groups in Egyptian society.

Politics of Education in Conflict

While education development is often discussed in technical terms, in reality it is profoundly ideological, and this creates real tensions in countries affected by conflict. Conflicting narratives in mainstream subjects such as history, geography and civic education are contested in relation to sub-national, national and international agendas for the role of education in society.

In Palestine, the development of the first-ever Palestinian national curriculum has been placed under intense international scrutiny since 2000 as a result of a political controversy surrounding the first Palestinian textbooks. While independent studies have since found many of the early allegations made against the curriculum to be "wildly exaggerated or inaccurate,"[353] Palestinian education is still regarded by international donors as "sensitive."[354] This has only heightened in the current context of internal conflict between Hamas and Fatah and the continuing split between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while educational institutions continue to bear the brunt. Nevertheless, of all the government strategies for education analyzed for this study, the Palestinian Authority's education development plan appears to be one of the most progressive,[355] although there are signs of a reduced political space for civil society within this process.

Meanwhile, Lebanon is only just emerging from two years of almost total paralysis in government, following the 2006 war with Israel and subsequent struggle between the government and Hizbollah-led opposition. This political and policy "freeze" has had implications for the development and implementation of the national education strategy. However, there are also longer-term issues around the curriculum, particularly in relation to history and civic education, which are still highly politicized in the absence of any process for national reconciliation after 15 years of civil war ended in 1991. The recent internal political tensions have simply reinforced a sense of latent instability and fears of a return to internal violence. Many interviewees in Lebanon talked about the important potential for education to address some of these issues and said that a lack of political consensus still holds it back.

Citizenship, Activism, and the State

Concepts of citizenship and, by extension, citizenship education, are very sensitive in all five countries in this study. Civic education is traditionally understood as "national education" in the MENA region, and is primarily about making students good and loyal citizens. In Lebanon, civic education is reduced to learning about laws and institutions in avoidance of bigger questions of national reconciliation. There are similarities between the curricula for "national education" in Egypt and Syria, where many interviewees felt civic education to be a subject for purposes of "indoctrination," which does not deal with central questions of citizenship, democracy or diversity. Indeed "national education" seems to promote imagined unitary identities and narratives while religious and ethnic minority voices are often silenced within these narratives.

Emerging international discourses around the role of citizenship education as a vehicle for promoting human rights, democratic principles, multiculturalism and social cohesion are not easily transferable to contexts in the Middle East, where voices of dissent are often discouraged and authoritarian teaching methods continue to be prevalent.[356] In Syria, for example, an analysis of the "National Socialist Education" textbook for the academic year 2007/2008 highlights that "scientific thinking" is promoted as a way of reducing ignorance, old traditions, underdevelopment, and religious fundamentalism; however, the exercises following the text propose questions that can only be answered if the student memorizes the lesson.

Yet new approaches to citizenship education offer a potentially interesting way of introducing new teaching methodologies and active learning, as well as addressing some of the key issues relevant to "education justice" in the region. Non-formal education also provides a space where citizenship education can be promoted: for example, in Lebanon, one local organization encourages young people from different backgrounds to work together on joint campaigns such as the "right to water," while a youth forum in Jordan promotes initiatives that foster learning outside the classroom, based on a belief in peer learning and learning through experience.[357] In Syria, a touring program provides spaces for self-learning and discovery and also facilitates communication skills and creativity.[358]

Other areas for promoting concepts of active and inclusive citizenship and community activism in education are PTAs. Although included in the national policies of most of the countries in this study, PTAs are often not implemented in practice. Research shows how PTAs could support areas that school staff may not have the time or resources to effectively implement, such as contacting students who have been absent for a long time, or providing help for children who need extra support.[359]

10.2 Political Space and the Role of Civil Society

Finally, it is important to highlight that some of the countries included in this study are highly politicized contexts for talking about issues of education justice. During some of the interviews, it was particularly difficult to critique government programs openly or to discuss issues related to marginalized children. Education is ultimately linked to a broader nation-building discourse and debates around school curricula, for example, are not always easily initiated. Aside from the internal political environment, international terminology such as "democratization" is also politically loaded, and often associated with western agendas for the region. In particular, US foreign policies are seen to "have had negative effects of putting the whole region on the defensive, and forcing its peoples to adhere even more to a decaying status quo."[360] The Syrian government, for example, officially declines US funds for program implementation, while both Palestinian and Syrian civil society networks have policies for not accepting USAID funding.

In some countries, such as Egypt and Palestine, there is more open debate around the role of education, and in other cases education has even served as a vehicle for talking about broader socio-political inequalities in society. In Lebanon, numerous interviewees talked about the fact that the main education providers in the country, the Ministry of Education and UNRWA, were "opening up" to external engagement, where previously they had been relatively closed to involving civil society organizations. This trend seemed to be echoed in other countries, too.

Nevertheless, across most countries in the study there is a relatively weak tradition of direct advocacy and involvement in policy processes relating to education, although this is shifting. As such, it is very important to work *with* national governments and other education providers (such as UNRWA) as well as supporting and encouraging their engagement with civil society. Cross-regional networks also have the potential to bolster support for advocacy and campaigning initiatives through linking national-level organizations working on similar issues. The recent emergence of the Global Campaign for Education in the region is one example of this.

It is also significant that local NGOs do not necessarily equate with grassroots movements or organizations and, indeed, the growing role of civil society organizations in the Middle East is linked to a range of different factors. In Palestine, for example, major increases in international aid since the Oslo Peace Process in the 1990s has led some to critique the emergence of an "NGO industry", and there is growing resentment that "civil society organizations" have become increasingly divorced from

the rest of society, along with frustration that the proliferation of NGOs has undermined grassroots movements for social and political change.[361] In other countries, the growing strength of NGOs is seen to be linked to neo-liberal economic agendas that shift the balance of power away from the state, where NGOs have become "providers" of education services rather than advocates of policy reform.

In the context of shifting and unequal power relations across the Middle East region, and what some perceive as the "co-option" of civil society organizations by international donor agendas, it is important that international organizations such as the Open Society Foundations are sensitized to supporting the emergence, growth, or regeneration of civil society activism in education, rather than pursuing generic solutions.

10.3 Regional Recommendations for the Open Society Foundations' "Education Justice" Strategy

Supporting a regional coalition of civil society partners to share skills, resources and knowledge

- The lens of "education justice" should highlight not only the inequalities present in education systems across the region but also the means for supporting marginalized sections of society in contributing to education change and reform processes. For example, Open Society Foundations should endeavor to support parent, student and teacher associations and networks as a means of generating community activism for equality in education.

- Civil society should not be narrowly defined as "NGOs"—if the Open Society Foundations are to contribute to empowering progressive civil society movements in education, then support needs to be given to different kinds of associations. For example, teachers' unions in the Middle East have tended to be party-political and/or centrally controlled by governments, and are currently limited in their influence as a result.

- University education departments, teachers' associations and civil society organizations need to be actively involved in developing national education strategies with governments. The Open Society Foundations should encourage other international donors to be committed to more participatory planning processes to make sure this happens.

- The bulk of the population in the countries included in this study is young people under the age of 25. Nevertheless, as highlighted by the UN and the League of Arab States, this demographic is often excluded from social, political and cultural participation[362] and also bears the brunt of high unemployment rates.[363] The Open Society Foundations should aid the growth of youth organizations and student councils in the region in order to support young people more generally, and enable them to contribute to processes of education change and reform.

- Given the relatively weak traditions of civil society advocacy toward national governments in the region, the development of the Open Society Foundations' strategy for education justice should incorporate ways and mechanisms to facilitate cross-regional support between national organizations working on different forms of inequality and discrimination in education, as well as broader issues of improving access to quality education. For example, the Global Campaign for Education is recently gaining momentum in the Middle East (the Arab Campaign for Education for All—ACAE).

- The Open Society Foundations should prioritize linking civil society partners with national governments and other education providers, working *with* advocacy targets rather than following a more confrontational approach which has limited potential in restricted political contexts. For example, Lebanon's roundtable approaches in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and in UNRWA have successfully facilitated greater involvement of civil society organizations in national policy processes.

- The non-formal education sector is a relatively new field in some of the countries included in this study and provides a space outside the formal school system where new ideas can be tried and developed. The Open Society Foundations could support organizations working in NFE as a way to contribute to strengthening concepts of youth participation as well as active learning and civic education.

Gaps in and of Inclusive Education Policies

- A focus on inclusive "policies" is not enough; many governments have made commitments to disability rights, for example, but these are not being implemented. Working with education providers also has to extend to the implementation phase and not stop at the strategy level.

- There tends to be a narrow understanding of inclusive education as referring only to the inclusion of disabled children. The Open Society Foundations should advocate for an expanded concept of inclusive education to mean removing *all* barriers to learning for *all* children. To this end, the Open Society Foundations should support organizations that work at understanding and removing the social, cultural and economic barriers to education that exist in schools and wider societies. Supporting disability organizations run by disabled people themselves can also contribute to more radical debates on inclusive education.

- Currently, civic education is regarded as problematic by civil society organizations and is generally understood in terms of "national education" enforcing a unitary national narrative and unquestioning loyalty to the state. Yet an expanded understanding of citizenship education has the potential to promote concepts such as diversity, multiculturalism, non-discrimination and inclusive and active citizenship in society, and could be a means for introducing active learning methods. The development of this potentially transformative role of citizenship education should be pursued through both formal and non-formal education channels, with a focus on implementation to avoid policy rhetoric. Citizenship education in schools (through formal and non-formal means) is also a vehicle for pioneering participatory methodologies and active learning.

Advocacy priorities at the regional and country levels framed both within and outside the EFA framework

- There is high enrollment across the MENA region and many countries are close to achieving Universal Primary Education. However, there needs to be a broader understanding of access to education beyond simple enrollment targets. National averages hide the exclusion of certain groups from education (such as disabled children, street children and ethnic minorities) as well as the widespread inequalities in accessing quality education in contexts of increasing privatization and inadequate levels of teacher training.

- Likewise, gender parity in enrollment is an inadequate measure of gender inequalities in education. While the gender gap is closing in terms of enrollment in school, major inequalities still remain with regard to post-school opportunities for young women, including access to the labor market and the professions.

- The promotion and facilitation of "critical thinking" in education is at the heart of improving education quality. This needs to happen at all levels of the system, from early childhood through to school and university levels. This needs to be approached holistically—from changing teaching methodologies through new models and strategies for teacher education, to working with individual schools to transform the working and learning environment.

- Transforming school environments helps students, teachers and parents to experience first-hand the benefits of participatory methods and active learning processes. This could include activating student councils and PTAs, as well as engaging the school community in thinking about how to improve their working and learning environment. Such an approach can also help to tackle widespread issues of violence in schools.

- New teaching methodologies and approaches need to be systematized through the development of (and coordination between) university education departments and other teacher education institutions; through providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on and share their experiences through teacher support networks; and through encouraging governments to pursue teacher education strategies, which can also contribute to teacher training strategies as well as address the devaluation of the teaching profession.

- University education departments are being underutilized in the development and delivery of certified teacher training programs and qualifications. The Open Society Foundations should also consider the role of university education departments in promoting education research. By neglecting the role of higher education in the development of the broader education sector, the cycle of poor-quality teaching and lack of critical thinking continues, while problems in national education systems are left under-examined and under-debated at the local level.

- Adult education is often reduced to basic literacy, encroaching on the right of adults to life-long learning and continuous training. Literacy environments[364] are not promoted, and there are few opportunities for adults to keep updated with new technologies and knowledge. Furthermore, adult literacy courses generally follow pedagogical approaches adequate for children but not suitable for adults to obtain an equal chance for every adult and every child. The Open Society Foundations should advocate for an expanded vision of adult education in the framework of lifelong learning, socio-economic mobility and equity. For

example, the Open Society Foundations could support the concept of *beit al-nas* (people's house), reaching out to adults and children in their own communities.

- Language is a very powerful tool for including and excluding children, and it can create huge inequalities between those who can access knowledge in foreign languages and those who cannot. The Open Society Foundations should endeavor to support organizations working to develop resource-sharing networks and promote the translation and adaptation of knowledge into Arabic.

Further research questions arising from the study

- In-depth research is needed on the socio-economic impacts of privatization in education (including in relation to the role of religion in education) across the region, as well as the changing relationship between public and private education.

- A closer examination is needed of gender parity in education enrollment and how far this translates into equality of opportunities throughout the education process and in post-school transitions into the labor market.

- A mapping of citizenship education in formal and non-formal education and the challenges and opportunities for promoting concepts of inclusive and active citizenship in schools coupled with more participatory and active learning methodologies is needed.

- There is a need for more research on migrant workers in the region: their conditions, their education opportunities and rights, and those of their children.

- There is a need for more qualitative research on "invisible" groups, including disabled, street and working children. To inform adequate policies, it is important to carry out research that reports their voices and their needs, as expressed by them.

- A closer examination should be made of how Classical Arabic could be taught in school in a more "child-friendly" way, and how this would affect children's cognitive development, achievement and capacity to acquire new knowledge.

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Acronyms

ACAE	Arab Campaign for Education for All
AEF	Arab Education Forum
AHED	Association for Health and Environment Development
AKF	Agha Khan Foundation
ANHRE	Arab Network for Human Rights and Citizenship Education
ANND	Arab NGOs Network for Development
ARC	Arab Resource Center
AUEED	Upper Egypt Association for Education and Development
BAU	Al-Balqa' Applied University
CERD	Center for Education Research and Development (Lebanon)
CBR	Community Based Rehabilitation
CFTA	Culture and Free Thought Association
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECCE	Early Childhood and Care Education
ECHRE	Egyptian Center for Human Rights Education
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERfKE	Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy
ERP	Education Reform Program
ESFs	Education Science Faculties
E-TVET	Employment-Technical and Vocational Education and Training
GMR	Global Monitoring Report

GPI	Gender Parity Index
HCAPD	Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities
HVS	Hope Village Society
IFE	Informal Education
ILO	International Labor Organization
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LPHU	Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MIS	Management of Information Stream
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoHESR	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
MoSAL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAQAAE	National Association for Quality and Accreditation of Education
NCCM	National Council for Childhood and Motherhood
NCERD	National Center for Education Research and Development (Egypt)
NCFA	National Council for Family Affairs
NCHDR	National Center for Human Resources Development
NCLAE	National Campaign for Literacy and Adult Education
NDP	National Democratic Party
NER	Net Enrollment Rates
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIPL	National Inclusion Program in Lebanon
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
OSF	Open Society Foundations

PA	Palestinian Authority
PCDC	Palestinian Curriculum Development Center
PCHR	The Palestinian Center for Human Rights
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SWU	Syrian Women's Union
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VTC	Vocational Training Corporation
WFP	World Food Program

Notes

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