

5th international Conference on Children and Youth in MENA Cities

Sheraton Hotel, 6-8 July, 2009, Aleppo, SYRIA

Under the auspices of Dr. Tamer Alhajeh, the Minister of Local Administration, the 5th international Conference on Children & Youth in MENA cities: "Education Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Youth for Labor Market" took place from 6-8 July, 2009 in Aleppo, Arab Republic of Syria.

Organizers of the conference:

- 1- Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI).
- 2- Aleppo City Council, Syria
- 3- Syria Trust for Development – SHABAB project.
- 4- World Bank.
- 5- UNISEF, Syria.

The Objectives of the Conference:

- 1- To highlight the problems and challenges facing children and youth in the MENA region.
- 2- Review of programs for youth rehabilitation, employment, and re-integration into labour markets.
- 3- Re-integration of school dropouts children into education.
- 4- Review of the role of municipalities and local administrations in strengthening the recruitment of young people.

Aleppo Conference is distinguished with its papers which focused on presenting the effective programs and global, regional, & local lessons and experiences implemented by governmental administrations, city councils, and non-governmental organizations to address the issues of children and youth and to strengthen partnership between the regional and international governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with the issues of rehabilitation, training and employment of youth.

More than 300 participants have participated in the conference as follows:

- Governmental authorities representing officials, mayors, municipalities, local administrations, cities, public organizations, international and regional bodies, and civil society organizations.
- Researchers, consultants, university professors, and chambers of industry and commerce representing "15" countries.
- Active participation by 100 young men, women and children.

The conference proceedings were coincident with two training workshops delivered by children-friendly cities:

- The first workshop presented by Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and Aleppo City Council. 28 trainees from related municipalities and organizations attended it.

- The second workshop titled "young people dialogue on Know about Business" organized by UNISEF and Syria Trust for Development "SHABAB Project". 30 young men and women from different Syrian cities participated in the workshop.

The Conference inaugurated with Syrian National anthem and recitation verses of the Holy Quran. In addition, there were opening speeches delivered by:

- Eng. Ali Ahmad Mansourah, the Governor of Aleppo, and the representative of the sponsor of the Conference.
- AUDI: Dr. Ibrahim Al-Turki on behalf of H.E. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Naeem, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and president of AUDI.
- Aleppo City Council: Dr. Ma'an Al-shibli, Mayor of Aleppo City Council.
- UNISEF, Syria: Dr. Shahrazad Boualia, UNISEF Representative.
- Syria Trust for Development: Ms. Yamama Oraibi, the Director of SHABAB Project.

Before concluding the inauguration session, cultural youth shows were presented by Baath Pioneers organization and Revolution Youth Union, Syria.

- During the three-day Conference, seven scientific sessions were held as the following:

First Session:

"Youth is the core and crux of development in the Arab World", and presenting "Youth Employment Experience in 5 Arab cities".

Second Session:

"Problems and Challenges of Youth & Children in the MENA Region", this session included four papers from Jordan and Egypt.

Third Session:

"Programs for Reintegrating Children and Youth in Formal, Informal, and Non-formal Education", this session included 4 papers from Turkey, Sudan, and Save the Children- UK experience in Arab region.

Fourth Session

"Youth Employment Programs: Experiences and Lessons learned from Regional and Arab Countries", this session included 6 papers from: Jordan, Syria, Ghana, Nigeria, United States of America, and UN- HABITAT's experience in three countries (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania).

Fifth Session

"Youth Rehabilitation: Training & Skills Development for Youth". This session included five papers from Syrian, Egypt, Morocco, and United States Agency for International Development USAID's experience in Arab and European countries.

Sixth Session

"The Role of Governmental and Non-governmental Organizations in alleviating Youth Unemployment Problem", this session included five papers from Syria, Malaysia, Algeria, and Yemen.

Seventh Session

Dialogue was conducted between young people and municipality Mayors on policies and youth employment programs. Therefore, the Conference message has been reached which represented in Youth engagement in developing strategies, programs, and projects in order to assist them to launch initiatives to fulfill sustainable development at economic, social, environmental, and educational levels. In addition, work on capacity building to create job opportunities compatible with their qualifications and respond to their aspirations

Eighth Session

The conclusion session, it included the final declaration, the Conference recommendations, the speech of Dr. Ma'an Alshibli; Mayor and Chairman of Aleppo City Council, and the speech of AUDI delivered by Dr Ibrahim Al-Turki; the Executive Director of Child Protection Initiative in MENA region.

Recommendations

Through the papers presented in the conference, deliberations and dialogues, the following recommendations have been reached:

- 1- **Sustainability**: the Conference recommends an effective participation between young people and concerned governmental and non-governmental authorities. In addition to the coordination on both levels national and local administrations to achieve the sustainability of children and youth-oriented programs and projects. Furthermore, the necessity of developing a clear strategy ensures the sustainability of these projects.
- 2- **Finance**: the Conference recommends that children and youth-oriented programs and projects should include clear policies and strategies to ensure finance from all resources and such funds must be appropriately invested. Furthermore, it should be taken into account the possibility of applying religious endowment "Islamic Waqf" on the revenues and assets of City Councils to achieve the sustainability of these programs and projects.
- 3- **Education, Training, & Rehabilitation**: the Conference recommends linking the education curricula, teaching and training schemes with the practical requirements of labor market. In addition, focus on the quality and continuous training and the actual application of partnership between labor sector and education sector with stressing on the participation of targeted group "Youth".
- 4- The Conference also recommends families participation in determining the structure of the education curricula, and to provide training and raise awareness of parents to be qualified to take part with their children in freedom of choice, confidence building, rapprochement and understanding and communication means.
- 5- To strengthen the **role of local administrations** in providing informal and continuous education, implementing preventive policies to address child labor, and providing alternate education for school dropouts.
- 6- **To address school dropout** by the stakeholders and families particularly in slums and squatter settlements.
- 7- To establish **close relationship between schools and local administrations**: work to ensure the safety of the roads lead to schools, school facilities and constructional environments in order to create child-friendly school.
- 8- **Media**: the conference recommends the media-related authorities to pay due attention to children and youth issues professionally and effectively, and to shed the light on the urgent needs of them and offer practical solutions.
- 9- Support the **Syrian SHABAB "Youth" project experience** on Know about Business (KAB) program in intermediate institutes after it achieved good results to be disseminated to all Arab countries and related organizations.

- 10- In view of a clear correlation between city and its rural area which affects the youth, the Conference recommends **that this correlation should be diagnosed** to develop strategies serve the youth issues.
- 11- **The necessity of networking** between authorities concerned with youth issues and programs and activating their participation in order to improve communication, information & data exchange and the implementation of the best practices.
- 12- Establish and develop **urban observatories** in cities and specify the outputs/outcomes of such observatories especially in the fields of poverty alleviation and create job opportunities through introducing income generating programs for youth and children.
- 13- Intervention by **stakeholders to combat street children phenomenon** through care, protection and rehabilitation programs. Moreover, the concerned authorities should intervene to get the credential documents of those children.
- 14- **Child labor**: the conference recommends finding a mechanism appropriate to enforce laws and legislations which combat child labor particularly in dangerous and immoral fields.
- 15- **Develop regulations and codes** for child and youth protection especially protecting females from all forms of violence.
- 16- In view of the **differences between rural communities** in multiple aspects depending on the geographical distribution, the conference recommends the inclusion of rural communities in youth-support programs in the education and training issues to provide their needs and to assist them to find the appropriate job.
- 17- Inclusion of **young people health issues** within children and youth-oriented programs and projects including reproduction health and infectious diseases. Furthermore, provide free food meals for those in need of them.
- 18- **Weakness of voluntary work** in Arab countries: the Conference recommends encouraging the voluntary work among young people through their participation via authorities concerned with their issue.
- 19- The dissemination of UN-HABITAT experience on "**one stop Youth Resource Center**". Thus, city councils and municipalities should provide support for these trends through offering the necessary premises, facilitations required for licenses needed for those centers, and identify the supervision authority.
- 20- Strengthen the **role of local administrations** in providing the informal education to rehabilitate the dropouts and to prepare them for the labor market.
- 21- Set up a committee on the governorates and cities level to **follow up children and youth-oriented programs and projects**.

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