



Consultative workshop on Child-friendly Cities in the MENA Region Amman, Jordan, 9 – 10th December 2007

WORKSHOP REPORT

The MENA Child Protection Initiative (CPI), in partnership with the Executive Agency for a Child-friendly City (EACFC), Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), organized a consultative workshop entitled "Child-friendly Cities in the MENA Region". The workshop was held in Al-Hussein Cultural Center during 9 – 10th December 2007. The workshop was inaugurated by H.E. Engineer Omar Ma'ani, Mayor of Amman, and included 78 participants (Annex 1: List of Participants). The participants included regional and international consultants, municipal, governmental and non-governmental officials and city councilors from Amman, Alexandria, Khartoum, Sana'a, Al-Madina Al-Munawara and Tehran; as well as representatives of some Jordanian national agencies, civil society organizations and media. The workshop was also attended by UNICEF Regional Advisors and officers from Jordan and Iran Country Offices, the Innocenti Research Center in Florence, Italy, and from Child Helpline International. Two youth representatives from Al-Madina, and six elected members from Amman's Children Municipal Council also participated in the workshop. H.E. Senator Prof. Rowaida Al-Maaitah, Member of the Jordanian Upper Parliament, presided over one of the plenary sessions.

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES:

The workshop was intended to accomplish the following objectives (Annex 2: Workshop Outline and Program):

1. To discuss the principles and strategies of the proposed MENA Child-friendly Cities (CFC) framework and to verify their relevance to the region.
2. To review the experience of Greater Amman Municipality in transforming itself into a child-friendly city – as a unique model in implementing the CFC – show-casing the studies, programs and projects that have been initiated so far.
3. To share experiences on innovative programs aimed at improving children's wellbeing that are being implemented within the region.
4. To identify capacity building needs of various local authorities vis-à-vis child-friendly cities.
5. To identify guidelines and measures to solidify the proposed principles and proposed MENA CFC framework.

Following is a summary of the workshop highlights:

A. Opening Session:

In his inaugural speech, H.E. the Mayor of Amman welcomed the participants, and confirmed Greater Amman's commitment to place children at the top of its priorities, to device channels whereby they could participate in decisions affecting Amman, and to provide adequately for their educational, cultural and recreational needs. H.E. mentioned a number of actions taken by GAM to translate its commitment into reality, including, *inter alia*, the establishment of the Executive Agency for a Child-friendly City, the Children's Municipal Council, etc.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Gamal Hamid, MENA CPI Director, outlined the CPI objectives and the highlights of its progress. He also announced the launching of a regional Child-friendly Cities program co-financed by the MENA CPI and AGFUND. The Program is intended to assist local authorities, civil society organizations and local communities in improving the well-being of young people and in transforming MENA cities into nurturing environments for children.

B. Presentations:

The following presentations were delivered during four sessions spread over two days:

1. An overview of the status of children and concerned institutions in MENA cities presented by **Prof. Osman Nour**, CPI Consultant. The review highlighted the health and educational status of children and the key challenges facing vulnerable and disadvantaged ones in the region. The main institutions dealing with children's issues include municipalities, childhood councils, line ministries and NGOs. Invariably, they need considerable capacity building to increase their efficiency and effectiveness.
2. **Dr. Eliana Riggio Chaudhuri**, Consultant for the MENA CFC program presented the main principles of CFC and a programmatic approach to them. After grounding the subject on the organic relationship between cities and children, and on the universally-endorsed children's rights, she defined CFC as an integrated framework for fulfilling children's rights. She also made a clear distinction between what a CFC is and what it is not.
3. In a follow-up presentation, **Dr. Eliana Riggio Chaudhuri** elaborated a CFC framework for action that incorporates four guiding principles, based on the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, and nine steps to building CFC.
4. **Dr. Sudeshna Chatterjee**, a specialist on Child-friendly environments, identified three main actors related to CFC: (i) producers (i.e. governments, private sector, NGOs and CBOs), (ii) regulators (i.e. parents, guardians and care givers); and (iii) users (i.e. children, youth and community). She argued that an ideal CFC unites those actors as partners and takes their respective views into account. She then presented an overview of key international CFC examples and drew from them lessons for MENA cities.
5. **Ms. Francesca Moneti**, Senior Program Officer at UNICEF Innocenti Research Center (IRC) defined CFC and explained how it is linked with the Millennium Development Goals. She then presented nine CFC building blocks, developed by the IRC, as a framework for action and introduced the work of the International CFC Secretariat, hosted by the IRC, which acts as a clearinghouse for CFC activities and outputs.
6. **Ms. Nafila Maani**, Program Manager, Child Helpline International (CHI), presented the work of CHI, which is an international network of some 122 help lines in 150 countries. Child help lines work as a protection, prevention and awareness-raising mechanism. Thus it can play an important role in national and local child protection strategies and in CFC. Municipalities and local governments thus should launch and/or facilitate the establishment of child help lines.
7. **Dr. Ali Maher**, Consultant of Tehran Municipality's Planning and Coordinating Deputy, presented an overview of the status of children and concerned institutions in Iran, prepared in collaboration with **Dr. Masoumeh Abad**, Member of Tehran City Council. The presentation focused on the efforts of Tehran Municipality in addressing the needs of street

children, the newly-established Child Hotline, the Social Service Centers in marginalized urban districts, and on other key programs and initiatives.

8. **Mr. Reza Manavi**, CFC Specialist, UNICEF Iran, presented the experience of UNICEF Iran in applying CFC principles to the reconstruction of the earthquake-destroyed city of Bam. Extensive consultations were held with children and local communities to arrive at a consensus on how to achieve a collective dream of a child-friendly and ecologically sustainable City of Bam. The presentation reviewed the progress achieved so far in the reconstruction and in building new child-friendly facilities.
9. **Mr. M. Baquer Namazi**, President of Hamyaran, Iran NGO Resource Center, presented the concept of Child Friendly Neighborhoods (CFN) as a means for achieving a holistic growth and development of children by engaging local communities in a collaborative partnership with all major stakeholders. He outlined the objectives, challenges, characteristics and proposed partnership arrangements of CFN and stressed the need to pilot the concept in a few neighborhoods before replicating it in other MENA cities. He called upon potential regional and international partners to join hands with Iranian counterparts to launch pilot CFNs.
10. **Ms. Tagreed Fakhoury**, CEO of GAM's EACFC, presented the experience of transforming Amman into a CFC, starting with the establishment of the EACFC in 2005 to orchestrate this process, and creation of a nurturing and conducive policy environment. She explained how the GAM Children Strategy was developed using an extensive consultative process. The Strategy has five main themes: culture, health, informal education, built environment and protection. Under each theme a number of innovative programs have been launched in partnership with national agencies, NGOs and regional organizations – viz. MENA CPI with which GAM has signed a memorandum of understanding. Some young people, who are members of GAM's Child Municipal Council and members of GAM's Council, participated actively in the ensuing discussion.
11. **Mr. Ala'a Abdel Khaleq**, Director of the National Foundation for Family and Community Development, Alexandria, presented the experience of Alexandria Governorate in establishing and institutionalizing a child protection mechanism (CPM) that involves partners from local and national government agencies, NGOs and private sector. The CPM is supported jointly by Alexandria Governorate, UNICEF and the MENA CPI with which the Governorate has signed a memorandum of understanding. The presentation covered the achievements of the first year of the program, the challenges faced and the key activities of the second year. These include strengthening the children's parliament and reaching out to the private sector to support establishment of a child protection fund that could ensure the sustainability of the CPM. **General Abdalla Hegab**, Head of West Alexandria District, in which the pilot phase of the CPM is implemented, participated in the presentation and the ensuing discussion.
12. **Ms. Naseem Al-Maliki**, Coordinator of the joint Sana'a Municipality – MENA CPI Program, presented highlights of the program, which is intended to improve the status of children in Sana'a, and to increase their participation in local public affairs through their children's parliament. The program is also intended to augment the capacities of Sana'a Municipality in addressing children's issues, and to assist in transforming it into a CFC. The presentation covered on-going programs, such as the support extended to children's public libraries and parks, as well as to the Rehabilitation of Working Children's Center. **Mr. Amin**

Guma'an, Deputy Mayor of Sana'a and Secretary General of its Local Council, participated in the ensuing discussion.

13. **Dr. Najwan A. Shamsuddin**, Secretary General of Khartoum State's Council for Child Welfare presented the experience of Khartoum State in caring for its children and improving their opportunities and conditions. The presentation focused on the programs supported by the State and the MENA CPI (through their joint memorandum of understanding), and other donors and partners. Supervised by a High Steering Committee, and implemented in two pilot localities in Khartoum, the program has made marked achievements in spite of its limited resources and the large number of at-risk children. It has managed to link child protection and poverty alleviation by provision of vocational training and skill development to older children and supporting micro-enterprises for families of disadvantaged children. **Dr. Jamila Fatahalrahman**, Director of Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Social Affairs, Khartoum State, participated in the ensuing discussion.
14. **Mr. Mohammad Alsrrani**, Al-Madina Al-Munawara Municipality, presented the Municipality's experience in implementing a child protection and welfare program in collaboration with the MENA CPI. The program started with wide consultations that involved all concerned NGOs, government agencies and young people resulting in identification of priorities for action. Among the key achievements of the program is the establishment of a coordinating unit, supported by an advisory committee, under the umbrella of Al-Madina Municipality, formation of a local children and youth council and introduction of a number of children-related indicators to be processed regularly by Al-Madina Local Urban Observatory in order to monitor progress vis-à-vis children. Two members of the children and youth local council participated in the presentation and the ensuing discussion.

C. Group Discussion:

The afternoon of the second day was devoted to group discussions whereby the participants formed three groups each led by a facilitator. The groups discussed the following issues/questions:

Group 1 and 2:

1. What actions do you think are needed to make your own city friendlier to children?
2. What actions do you think are needed at the regional level to make the MENA region friendlier to children?
3. The CFC framework represents the current international consensus based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. What elements do you consider particularly relevant for the MENA region?
4. What elements do you consider particularly relevant for your own city?
5. To what extent do you think children participation in urban affairs/management in your city is feasible? If so, how can it be increased and made more effective?

Group 3:

1. The CFC framework represents the current international consensus based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. What elements do you consider particularly relevant for the MENA region?
2. What elements do you consider particularly relevant for your own city?
3. What are the institutions (GO's, NGO's, and private sector) in your city that can make the biggest difference in making your city friendlier to children and should be involved in a CFC Initiative?

4. What form of capacity building do NGOs in your city need in order to implement this framework and to make the city more children friendly?
5. What form of capacity building do children in your city need in order to participate more effectively in implementing this framework and to make the city more child-friendly?

D. Recommendations

In the **Closing Plenary Session** each group presented the outcome of its deliberations and its recommendations which were subjected to further discussion by all participants. Following is a synthesis of the main recommendations grouped under eight themes¹:

(i) Foster children's participation

- If children's rights must be protected, **young people should be given an opportunity to make decisions on issues that affect their lives**. Consulting children is the first step in building a child-friendly city. Municipalities and communities need to **create avenues to encourage participation** at different levels (in the family, the school, the local government), with special attention to excluded groups.
- Children's participation in MENA is not only desirable, but also - as proven by the experiences shared at the workshop - possible. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by all countries in the Region except Somalia, binds national and local governments and families to **develop avenues for child participation** starting from the level of the home and the neighborhood, the immediate environments where children live.
- Children's participation should not be an afterthought after decisions are made. **Young people should be involved from the beginning and across the entire span of decision-making and planning processes** - from design, to implementation and evaluation of physical and social services and amenities, and cultural, recreational and play activities.
- Young people who have been raised to abide by adult authority and decisions should be supported in **developing confidence and communication skills** to convey their needs with the respect and clarity necessary to have their opinions heard.
- Participatory processes with children should aim to overcome cultural, social and economic barriers and **make the urban environment enabling and inclusive of all social groups**.

(ii) Raise awareness in communities and in the city

- **Awareness needs to be raised on children's rights and on the needs** expressed by young people living in the city, especially among decision-makers, implementers, families and those who work for children.
- **All levels of society should be informed and sensitized** about the changes that are underway in the city to make it more child-friendly. In particular, they need to appreciate the value of developing legal frameworks and plans in a rights framework.

(iii) Assess local needs

- **The needs of children, their families and communities must be assessed** to ascertain the resources available in the city as well as the gaps persisting in service provision, as a way to identify priorities for action.

¹ We are grateful to Dr. Eliana Riggio Chaudhuri for preparing this synthesis.

(iv) Develop a citywide children's strategy

- Local authorities should develop a citywide **children's strategy** to support child-friendly inclusive and integrated social services and physical environments. The children's strategy would be more effective and sustainable if **mainstreamed into established municipal planning processes**, such as the master plan or other major city plans.
- The children's strategy should aim to **develop enabling environments** for children, to prevent abuse, violence and exploitation, and foster growth and development of children to their full potential.
- Amman has developed a model playground to work as a single window for delivering a number of different services to children. Similarly, an integrated approach should be adopted in all cities to ensure **convergence** of services and programs, overcoming fragmentation of intervention.

(v) Institutionalize children's budgets

- Support cities in developing **children's budgets** even when resources are limited, adopting demystified financial mechanisms to analyze existing budget documents, mobilizing additional resources (from local, national and international sources) and involving citizens (including young people) in making budgetary decisions.
- Exercise pressure on decisions-makers to develop children's budgets to **the maximum extent of existing resources** and to **institutionalize children's budgets** in the municipal system.

(vi) Forge partnerships

- **Involve influential and resourceful partners** in developing child-friendly cities and give them an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes affecting children, thus making local governance more transparent and accountable.
- **Key partners** to be involved in building child-friendly cities should include local authorities, ministries of planning, social welfare, child development, education and health, UN and other development agencies, national and local NGOs, the private sector, local communities and leaders.
- A commitment should be sought from local, national and international partners to support the development of child-friendly cities and neighborhoods through a **multi-stakeholder approach** at the different levels of governance, starting from the local one.

(vii) Build capacities

- Policy-makers, implementers and practitioners should be supported with **knowledge and skills** in a number of areas that are critical to building CFC, such as communication, facilitating intergenerational dialogues between adults and young people and fostering social corporate responsibility processes.
- To contribute meaningfully to making cities more child-friendly, **young people's capacity should be strengthened** in the areas of communication, management and life skills. Young people can be helped to learn through practical methodologies. Learning by doing processes can support children in better expressing themselves and channeling their creative thinking toward meeting important developmental objectives.

(viii) Promote a regional child-friendly cities initiative in MENA

- A **regional network** should be established in MENA to encourage a dialogue and a common understanding of the meaning of children's rights and the implications for implementing them in the Region.
- A **regional network of child-friendly mayors** should be created to ensure that children's rights are given high visibility in each city of the Region, as well as at national and regional levels.
- The MENA CFC initiative should help enhance the quality of children's policies and create a MENA-wide **CFC policy dialogue and development process**.
- Use the CFC platform as a basis for establishing **standards for planning and service design** for urban children.
- In setting in motion a CFC initiative in MENA, special attention should be given to building the movement from grassroots, with a focus on communities and neighborhoods. Participants agreed that the idea of the **child friendly neighborhoods (CFN)** could become a suitable entry point for implementation of CFC; therefore, it should be piloted in several cities. Participants from Iran, Jordan, Sudan and Yemen volunteered to explore the possibility of piloting the CFN model in some of their cities.
- The CFC and the children's rights movement should be used as a platform to foster a **culture of peace** in the Region. They should be promoted in conflict situations, such as Sudan, Palestine, Somalia and Iraq, as **zones of peace for children**.
- Existing promising child-friendly processes underway in the region should be developed into a **national and regional child-friendly movement** aimed at fulfilling human rights and meeting development goals for all children, especially the most vulnerable ones. The growing attention being paid by MENA governments to decentralization and good local governance can serve the goal of child development.
- The MENA CFC movement should be **linked with similar regional and international networks** as a way to exchange support in terms of sharing experiences, transferring knowledge and expertise, jointly promoting children's rights across local governments and communities.
- A **secretariat should be established in the Region** to support the development of a MENA CFC network. The responsibility for managing the Secretariat may be assigned to different cities/countries on a rotation basis.²
- The Amman workshop has been a step in furthering children's rights in MENA. More such **workshops** should be organized, each time in a different city to expose participants to **good practices** being developed in different parts of the Region.
- **An independent unit should be established to monitor children rights** in the Region, relying on local assessments to ensure that corrective action is inclusive of the entire range of local situations.
- A **website** should be developed and regularly maintained to showcase successful practices in the Region and facilitate interactions among different groups involved in the initiative, first and foremost young people.

The MENA CPI, which is currently spearheading efforts to launch a regional CFC program, will ensure that, as far as possible, these recommendations are taken into account as the MENA CFC program evolves. MENA CPI will report regularly on the progress made in launching and sustaining the CFC program.

² It was proposed that Tehran could host the MENA CFC Secretariat for the first two years.