



Education for All in the Arab States: Renewing the Commitment

The Arab Framework for Action
to Ensure Basic Learning Needs in the Arab
States in the Years 2000-2010

Adopted by the Regional Conference on Education for All
for the Arab States
Cairo, Egypt, 24-27 January 2000



Preamble

Based on the assessment of the efforts and achievements made in the Arab States as regards basic education, Education for All, since the Jomtien Conference (1990) until the end of the decade (the year 2000), in preparation for the International Forum on EFA (Dakar, April 2000);

According to:

- the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on Education for All, the Arab Document on Children, the Arab Plan for Childhood Care, Protection and Development, and other Arab and international documents on education, and
- the strategies adopted by the Arab Ministers of Education during their meetings;

Aware of world challenges and changes and their consequences on the development of the Arab Region, and in order to benefit from their positive achievements while avoiding their negative consequences;

Conscious of the importance of education as a key for human development which constitutes a generator of global sustainable development;

In order to achieve education for all, both quantitatively and qualitatively, an education of high quality that is aimed at enabling all to achieve excellence and to develop, strengthen and promote their capacities to the fullest extent;

Reaffirming the role of education in providing equal educational opportunities for boys and girls, both urban and rural, and in keeping with the spirit of the century represented by the scientific, computer and technological revolutions that reaffirm the concept of self-learning which constitutes the basis for lifelong learning, in order to allow individuals to have access to data and to criticize, select, classify, treat and use this data in the different areas of social, economic and cultural life;

Considering the fact that education is a social issue, and that all Arab and international forces, institutions and organizations as well as government and non-governmental associations, unions and organizations, should join efforts to meet the Education for All needs and goals;

Inspired by the cultural and spiritual values of the Arab nation which reaffirm that education is an essential dimension of our cultural identity today and in the future;

We, the participants in the Arab Regional Conference on Education for All – EFA 2000 Assessment, held in Cairo from 24 to 27 January 2000, recommend that Arab States adopt the document

entitled *Education for All in the Arab States: Renewing the Commitment* as the Arab Framework for Action to Ensure Basic Learning Needs in the Arab States in the Years 2000-2010.

Introduction

1. The Arab Framework for Action to Ensure Basic Learning Needs in the Arab States in the Years 2000-2010 is based upon the following:

- (1) The World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, respectively adopted and agreed on by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990);
- (2) The Mid-decade Review of the International Consultative Forum on EFA (Amman, 1996) and the various international and Arab activities related to the Declaration and Framework for Action undertaken in the 1990s as regards the substance of the two aforementioned documents;
- (3) The documents about childhood and Education for All adopted by the Ministers of Education in the Arab States;
- (4) EFA 2000 Assessment made by the Arab States in preparation for The Arab Regional Conference on Education for All (Cairo, 24-27 January 2000);
- (5) The Preliminary Draft Framework for Action elaborated by the International Consultative Forum on EFA and proposed to discussion in preparation of the World Education Forum (Dakar, April 2000); and
- (6) The discussions of the Arab Regional Conference on Education for All – EFA Year 2000 Assessment held in Cairo (24-27 January 2000).

2. The objectives of this Framework are twofold:

- (1) To form a reference and guide for all stakeholders concerned with education in the Arab Region and committed to achieving the goals of Education for All, in their strategies, plans and programmes;
- (2) To convey the concerns of the Arab States while discussing the EFA issues at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, April 2000).

I. Background

Learning is the key to human sustainable development and is the foundation for enlightened existence and the sustenance of all livelihoods

3. Learning, this treasure within, is the product of open and diversified access to knowledge and experience. Thus, the concept of learning throughout life emerges as one of the keys to life in the

twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between school and lifelong education. It is designed to meet the challenges posed by a rapidly changing world.

4. Four pillars were proposed as the foundation of education by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, i.e.: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to be* and *learning to live together, learning to live with others*. The capacity to learn is at the heart of human development. It is the foundation for enlightened existence and the sustenance of all livelihoods.
5. Education aims not only at providing equal opportunities for individuals to learn, but also at achieving a *learning society* based on the acquisition, renewal and use of knowledge. This involves increasing the scope and opportunities for access to knowledge for all individuals. Education should enable everyone to gather information and to select, arrange, manage and use it. Learning is the key to sustainable human development.

Enhancing learning is improving the quality of life

6. The provision of equal opportunities for learning is a mandatory social service that must be provided to all individuals, as one of their basic rights and a condition for improving the quality of life. Health care is another important social service. It encompasses fighting diseases, providing nutrition and pure water, and ensuring an unpolluted environment.
7. Among these mandatory social services other than education is health care, which encompasses the eradication of diseases, the provision of nutrition, safe water and a non-polluted environment. The expansion of education has led to greater health awareness. Education for women leads not only to enhanced child health care but also to the enhancement of the general care of children, including their education. Enhancement of the educational level of the mother is no doubt the most crucial factor underlying participation in education and improving the quality of life.
8. Moreover, the expansion of education leads to a more enhanced environmental awareness, a greater knowledge of basic rights and duties, and a generally increased sense of citizenship and enlightened involvement in civic life. It is generally believed today all over the world that education is the most important means to fight poverty.

Meeting basic learning needs is an international priority

9. The World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990) affirmed the necessity to provide basic learning needs by stating that: **'Every person — child, youth and adult —**

shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.'

10. Furthermore, the Jomtien Conference agreed on a framework, derived from the World Declaration on Education for All, to be taken as a guide for action at the national, regional and international levels.

Re-affirmation of the Jomtien message at the international level

11. During the ten years after the Jomtien Conference, the international community, with the participation of the Arab States, has witnessed a series of conferences, all of which re-affirmed the message of the Jomtien Declaration and linked education to development, quality of life, human rights, democracy, social integration and justice. These conferences called for a special emphasis on the education of girls and women, and the struggle against poverty, unemployment and social exclusion (the World Summit for Children, 1990; the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992; the World Conference on Human Rights, 1993; the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994; the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, 1994; the World Summit for Social Development, 1995; the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995; the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, 1997; etc).
12. The Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (Amman, 1996) was held to assess what has been achieved in the five years that followed the Jomtien Conference. The meeting discussed various new challenges and the continuing challenges that still have to be addressed. The Amman Affirmation recommended 'stressing the forms of learning and critical thinking that enable individuals to understand changing environments, create new knowledge and shape their own destinies'. It further noted that the continuing challenges to the goals of EFA include mainly the education of women and girls, the training, status and motivation of teachers, the role of the family and the local community in education, and the broad partnership to achieve EFA goals.

Re-affirmation of the Jomtien message at the Arab level

13. At the Arab level, the Cairo Declaration (1994) emphasized the role of education in achieving sustainable development. The Conference expressed its determination 'to frame educational programmes that would bring the region into a position of world prominence in the next century'. The Conference concluded that two major areas stand out as pressing priorities requiring concerted action: the problem of illiteracy and the quality of education.

14. Furthermore, the Arab Declaration on Adult Education (Cairo, 1997) re-affirmed the contents of Jomtien Declaration (1990) and Amman Affirmation (1996), and renewed its commitment towards The Arab Strategy for Education, the Strategy to Eradicate Illiteracy in the Arab States and the recommendations of the Arab conferences on education, particularly the Fifth Conference of Ministers of Education and Those Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States (MINEDARAB V) held in Cairo, 1994. The Arab Declaration on Adult Education called for the necessity to consider illiteracy eradication as a top priority for the development of the Arab States. It also confirmed its endeavour to ensure new opportunities and educational programmes for the continuous education of adults.

II. Achievements and problems

15. The efforts exerted at the international, regional and Arab levels have culminated in various policies, laws, measures, programmes and activities at the level of each Arab State. This in turn has led to an improvement in the quality of life and to providing learning opportunities and improving education quality.

16. Yet, all that has been achieved by the end of the twentieth century remains below the expectations. Poverty is still widespread and, where it exists, educational opportunities decrease and so does the quality of health care. In addition, there is a spread of other problems, like unemployment, violence, conflicts and the continuous threat to family ties and social integration. Poverty generates poverty, as illiteracy generates illiteracy conducive to social decline. In some countries, the suffering is greater than in others; in rural areas more than in urban ones; in geographically remote areas, and among marginalized minorities and nomads more than among others.

17. Although various studies have highlighted the importance of educating females as a positive investment factor, girls and women have not sufficiently benefited from the allocated resources. Where girls do complete a primary education, there is often a large gender gap in the transition rate to secondary school. The gap between males and females becomes wider when literacy is considered. When combined with other factors related to the quality of life (especially in rural areas and shanty towns) such as poverty, disability, violence against females, malnutrition, rapid social changes, unemployment and risks of acquiring diseases such as AIDS, it appears that the females are more systematically disadvantaged than their male counterparts, on the basis of discrimination by gender.

Early childhood education still does not receive the required attention

18. Most of the Arab States have a pre-primary system of education for children aged 3-5 years. In some States, this takes on a traditional form, such as the *Kuttabs*, supported by government as in Morocco and Mauritania. The gross enrolment ratio (GER), however, varies between 0.7 per cent and 99 per cent – the educational indicator showing the widest discrepancy between Arab States. But all states reported improvement between 1990 and 1999. In the latter, the ratio is less than 13 per cent in ten states, between 13 and 50 per cent in six states, and more than 70 per cent in only two states (Lebanon 71 per cent and Kuwait 99 per cent). This shows that Arab States, rich and poor countries alike, do not devote the required attention to ECCD. It seems that, for the Arab States, education at this stage is primarily a family matter.

19. On the other hand, the percentage of children who attend the first grade of primary education after pursuing certain pre-primary schooling (for one year or more) is higher than GER in pre-primary. This indicates, first, that pre-primary schooling is short term in most states, and second, that the tendency towards schooling at the pre-primary level is increasing. In most Arab States, ECCD still generally constitutes an important challenge, since it affects school life at the primary level.

Increase in primary education enrolment

20. The most important achievements in the Arab States in the previous decade relate to enrolment in primary education. Most of the Arab States either maintained or improved their enrolment ratio in the first grade (6-7 years old). The countries which still show low GER at this level (82 per cent and below in late 1990s) are Djibouti, the Sudan, Mauritania and Yemen. Where enrolment ratios are high, the gender gap is smaller (1 to 4 percentage points), and where they are low it increases (10 percentage points). Yet, when looking at the net enrolment ratio (NER) at the first grade the picture is different: nine countries show a NER of 82 per cent and below.

21. In terms of GER in primary education, the Arab States have demonstrated significant progress. Only in three countries is GER equal to 68 per cent and below, versus thirteen countries where it is 90 per cent and above (and where gender parity index is 0.9 and above). Two countries have shown a very high rate of progress between the early and late 1990s: the Sudan and Mauritania.

22. Besides this progress, the discrepancies between rural and urban areas are still high, and female participation in primary education is always less than that of males (the parity index is equal to 1.0 and above in one country). In addition, the problem of enrolment appears more striking when looking at the NER.

In spite of a real improvement in the 1990s, there are still six countries which have a NER of less than 80 per cent, and where the gap between boys and girls widens in this regard: the parity index is equal to or less than 0.9 in six countries.

Illiteracy yet prevails

- 23.** The number of illiterates in the Arab States is estimated today at 68 million (of which 63 per cent are women). Despite the expanded efforts, one fourth of these is found in one country: Egypt (17 million), and 70 per cent in five countries: Egypt, the Sudan, Algeria, Morocco and Yemen. In most of these countries illiteracy is accompanied by population size, high population growth rates, poverty and concentration of population in rural areas.
- 24.** It is clear that the feature of illiteracy in the Arab States is different from that of the expansion of primary education, for illiteracy is the negative product of education that had not been completely expanded in the past. The strongest element in the spread of illiteracy in the Arab States and its strongest explanatory factor is the gender gap. The Gender Parity Index in these countries is 0.69. This indicates that illiteracy in the Arab Region is caused not only by poverty, but also by attitudes against education of girls and by the absence of effective policies to change these attitudes.
- 25.** The presence of 68 million illiterates in the Arab Region and the existence of illiteracy in all Arab States, though in widely varying rates, not only represent a great challenge to these states in terms of development, social justice and the quality of life, but also serves as a serious indictment to the education systems themselves. These marks are reflected in the failure of schools to draw children and to retain them enough to prevent them from returning to illiteracy as well as in the low level of learning achievement.

Quality education is still a privilege for a few

- 26.** After Jomtien, learning achievement was adopted as a key indicator of the quality of education. Nine Arab States participated (between 1993 and 1999) in the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) project conducted by UNESCO and UNICEF. The results show that competencies acquired by pupils in primary education (4th grade) are far below the standard proposed in Jomtien: only 12 per cent, 10 per cent and 25 per cent showed high skills (80 per cent of the competencies or more) in Arabic, mathematics and life skills, respectively. In Arabic language, only Tunisia and Morocco achieved the benchmark rate suggested at Jomtien (80 per cent of pupils). None of the participating states achieved the suggested level in mastering mathematics competencies. Only Tunisia and Jordan reached the suggested level of achievement in life-skills tests. In average, the

achievement of girls was better than that of boys. Achievement among pupils in urban schools was higher than in rural schools.

- 27.** According to the results of the Monitoring Learning Achievement project, primary education in the Arab States appears to be of poor quality and not providing for the basic learning needs to the pupils. This means that, in the past, these states focused more on providing school places than on enhancing the quality of education. Therefore, improving the quality of education constitutes a main challenge to the Arab States.
- 28.** Among the components of learning acquisition, basic skills for a better life are to be taken into consideration. Many Arab States include, in their educational goals and objectives, elements related to these skills, such as vocational training, health, environment and citizenship education. Mass media are also mentioned as a means for the transmission of values and knowledge in relation to these skills. However, in general, these essential aspects of learning have not received sufficient attention and the information about the acquisition of basic skills related to the quality of life is still very scarce.

Teachers' qualifications need improvement

- 29.** Data from Arab States show that the teachers fulfilling the minimum required national qualifications vary widely between 21 per cent and 100 per cent (late 1990s). In addition, the required entry qualifications vary from completing secondary school to completing four or five years at a higher education institution. They also differ in terms of pedagogical requirements from nil to a full programme approaching international standards. This is a large discrepancy. The concept of teaching licence is still not common in educational circles and professionalization of teaching remains a rhetorical discourse. However, the pupil/teacher ratio is low in general. It ranges between 11 and 25 in fourteen states, as opposed to 26 and 30 in three states and 31 and above in two. Furthermore, more efforts should be exerted in order to resolve many problems facing the status of teachers, mainly concerning their work conditions and their social position, in order to attract young and qualified people.

Improvements in internal efficiency

- 30.** Available data on internal efficiency show slight decline in repetition rates, improvement in the number of pupils staying at school until the 5th grade and better performance of girls as compared to boys. However, the primary level of the education systems in the Arab States still shows weaknesses in internal efficiency: persistence of drop-out and repetition (which increase the higher one goes up the educational ladder), and the long time needed to complete primary education.

Expenditure on education

31. Achievements and problems of education in the Arab States depend largely, among other factors, on expenditure. Arab States exerted a substantial effort that led to a greater expenditure on education in the last decade. But, in view of what has been mentioned about enrolment ratios and quality of education, the expenditure on primary education seems to be suffering from different problems: inadequacy, in some countries, between financial resources and educational requirements; wastage or lack of rationalization of spending; weakness in capital expenditure (investment); high cost of educating remote and widespread population; and weakness in budgeting techniques. Such problems raise questions about the potential role of non-governmental organizations, diversification of financial sources, mobilization of resources, accountability, and the means to build the national capacity for planning, budgeting and assessment.

Poor management of education systems

32. If the increase of financial resources may be a pressing need for poor countries, the major problem in most of Arab States is how to make a good use of available resources, human as well as financial. Surveys on learning achievement showed the absence of developed systems of monitoring. Reports on expenditure show problems in terms of planning and budgeting. Education management information systems (EMIS) are lacking in general. Problems of centralization versus decentralization are still debated. Thus, the issue of efficient educational management constitutes a serious challenge in the Arab States in order to meet the goals of EFA.

III. Challenges and opportunities

33. Time is passing and, in the Arab Region, millions of individuals remain deprived of education and millions are getting education of poor quality, while most of the rest are not appropriately prepared for the technological era and the international competition in the new millenium. We are faced with the challenge of achieving what has not been achieved since Jomtien and with the new challenges after 2000.

34. There is a general consensus on EFA goals, and that education for all is pivotal in addressing increasing poverty, sustaining socio-economic progress, and honouring the human rights of every individual. Lacking are the necessary resources. And despite the political will, and although education stands high on rhetorical agendas of governments, commitments made at Jomtien by Arab States remain highly visible but significantly unmet.

35. It is more starkly evident that failure to quicken the pace of progress towards Jomtien goals will have grave consequences for peace, stability and prosperity. The stage is now set for a stronger, more action-oriented approach of country initiatives for basic education, with important international commitment and support, reset within the circumstances and imperatives of the new millenium.

The challenges of the twenty-first century – outlook for 2010

36. Globalization imposes a labour market that surpasses the boundaries of countries and a tough competition according to the acquired qualifications. These qualifications are primarily the product of learning.

37. Globalization furthermore dictates the increasing use of technology, which is the most efficient means for production and communication. But the ability to make use of technology and what that entails in terms of skills and knowledge is also a product of learning. So what can the Arab educational authorities and organizations do to prevent marginalization and to positively participate in the globalization process?

38. Technology also induces in people a deep transformation in how to learn, how to use what they have learned, and how to evaluate the importance and relevance of what they have learned. We live in a period where economical progress is essentially based on knowledge. Thus, learning becomes more than ever a decisive factor in prosperity.

39. This also means that the cost of learning will increase. This is as true for households as it is for countries. Poor countries, unable to enter more technology-intensive-based markets, run the risk of excessive marginalization in trade and investment. In developed and developing countries alike, poverty and inequality at the household levels are increasingly associated with educational attainment. And the gap is widening between those who have access to information and the capacity to use technology of communication (e-mail, e-commerce and e-learning) and those who don't or can't.

40. The Arab States furthermore face the problem of the usage of foreign language as the technological medium. Mastering a foreign language is not generalized, nor is the Arabization of technology.

41. The unpredictable changes surrounding our lives give daily new meaning to the imperatives of the Jomtien commitments. That is because, as skills requirements for adequate, livelihood sustaining employment rise, basic education becomes ever more essential for work, or for school success and transition to secondary and higher levels of education.

42. Demographic growth poses another challenge to the education systems. While the annual average growth rate is estimated for the years 2000-2010 at 1.2 per cent for the world and 1.5 per cent for the developing countries, it is 2.5 per cent for the Arab States. In 2010, the estimated population of the age group 5-18 years old is 110 million. If the enrolment ratio in general education will be around 80 per cent for this age group, Arab States have to ensure educational opportunities to 88 million students, i.e. to provide resources for an additional 29 million students (present figure: 59 million students). This demographic increase places severe pressures on the education systems in terms of expenditure, management, qualified human resources, etc. At the same time, the population growth entails competing demands for resources to ensure other basic needs such as nutrition, housing, health services, etc. Some education systems in the Arab States have suffered from high indebtedness and the consequences of applying structural adjustment and economic reform policies.

43. Furthermore, in the past decade a number of Arab States suffered from persistent troubles and conflicts (Algeria and the Sudan), embargoes (Iraq, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Sudan), occupation and wars (Lebanon, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic and the Sudan). The education systems in these countries suffered deeply from these troubles which hindered their capacities and delayed the achievement of their objectives according to the Jomtien Declaration. The return to peace and normal life through the elimination of all forms of occupation, embargoes, conflicts and tensions appears to be a *sine qua non* precondition to ensure education for all in troubled areas. In parallel, education has a role to play in contributing to create a peaceful environment in the region.

Building on available opportunities and progress made

44. Facing these challenges does not initiate from a void. It has to be recognized that there are opportunities available that were not there a decade ago. An unequivocal global consensus has been forged around the critical role of education for sustainable human development. There is an even stronger reaffirmation of the importance of human rights. Since the Copenhagen Summit (1995), there is renewed concern for the rights of the socially excluded, marginalized, and impoverished, and mounting recognition of the benefits for societies of educating females.

45. Donors are answering the calls from countries to strengthen ownership of competencies and the development of national capacities. The educational deterioration that many developing countries experienced in the 1990s has been stemmed. And it is noticeable that civil society has become more likely to assume its responsibilities.

46. New and creative ways are now available also for reaching out to learners with disabilities or learning difficulties, as a means of ensuring that their capacities for learning are given the utmost chance to flourish.

47. Modern information and communication technologies offer in general enormous potential for educational outreach, enhancing access, self-paced learning and meticulous assessment of learning outcomes.

48. At the national level, new synergies are beginning to develop around more comprehensive governance systems and the participation of a wider set of actors, such as NGOs representing civil society in educational planning and implementation.

49. At the global level, original core sponsorship of education for all (by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and UNDP) has extended through the International Consultative Forum to engage another United Nations agency (UNFPA) and representation from a wide set of public, private and non-governmental constituencies.

The year 2000: renewing the commitment to the Jomtien Declaration

50. Ten years after the Jomtien Declaration, the definition of basic education and the commitments surrounding it still stand as a persistent challenge to the Arab States. This Declaration focused, for the first time, on the basic learning needs of neglected minorities and on learning achievement rather than on mere school enrolment.

51. The ten articles of the Jomtien Declaration shed light, illuminating the road ahead: (1) meeting basic learning needs; (2) shaping the vision; (3) universalizing access and promoting equity; (4) focusing on learning acquisition; (5) broadening the means and scope of basic education; (6) enhancing the environment for learning; (7) strengthening partnerships; (8) developing a supporting policy context; (9) mobilizing resources; and (10) strengthening international solidarity.

52. The Jomtien Declaration remains even more vibrant and relevant today. The commitment should be renewed. And the follow-up efforts already exerted by the states must be continued and enriched by the experiences and the information gained during the past decade. We have a shared responsibility to ensure that failure is prevented.

The Arab Framework for Action: a guide for all the partners to achieve EFA

53. Taking into account the above-mentioned background, the achievements and the problems in the Arab States and the

challenges – those imposed by what was unmet in the 1990s and those imposed by the developments of the twenty-first century – the Arab States are called upon to adopt this Framework for Action and to act in conformity with it.

54. The purpose of the Arab Framework for Action is to act as a reference and a guide for all stakeholders concerned with education in the Arab States and committed to achieving education for all, in their plans and programmes, each within its adopted goals, missions, and target groups, with the view of strengthening partnerships at the global, regional and local levels, in the single aim of meeting basic learning needs of all by 2010.

55. The main **stakeholders** to this Framework are:

- (1) The governments of the Arab States which hold responsibility for immediate action towards achieving the goals of education for all, and for leading and co-ordinating actions aimed at achieving these goals;
- (2) All stakeholders from civil society at the national level, i.e. universities and other educational institutions, NGOs, the private sector, etc., which should take a proactive role in contributing significantly to the achievement of the goals of education for all;
- (3) Arab and other regional organizations in the Arab States Region responsible for providing support and for promoting bilateral and multilateral co-operation at the Arab regional level; and
- (4) International agencies and organizations responsible for providing support and promoting bilateral and multilateral co-operation at the international level.

IV. Principles for action

56. The following five principles are proposed as guidelines for all actions aiming at ensuring the provision of basic learning needs in the Arab States.

57. The principle of **comprehensiveness**, which includes the following:

- Viewing education for all through the expanded vision confirmed in Jomtien;
- Considering learning as one of the key components of the quality of life, and an essential factor in improving this quality;
- The acknowledgment at all levels and sectors of society that learning is the cornerstone to sustainable human development;
- Dealing with learners in a holistic manner, in order to understand their surrounding environment and to meet their needs and develop their personalities in an integrated and harmonious manner.

58. The principle of **equity**, which consists of the following:

- Considering access to educational opportunities as an absolute right to be provided by society to all citizens of all ages without discrimination;
- Considering social and geographical inequality of educational opportunities as a factor leading to the creation of a gap in society that is hard to close;
- Integrating in the educational plans and processes the various excluded groups, such as the impoverished, rural populations, the marginalized, the displaced, refugees, nomads, immigrants, street and working children, and others in difficult circumstances;
- Addressing the needs of special groups and racial, religious, and cultural minorities when generalizing programmes and curricula;
- Considering gender discrimination in basic education as incompatible with social equity and with development needs, and as a breach in human rights;
- Considering the inclusion of learners with special needs, especially those with disabilities and learning difficulties, in educational programmes, as a right and an essential means for their self-actualization and social integration;
- Providing the gifted and talented with special care and an appropriate teaching/learning environment so as to develop their talents and capacities in order to contribute in the development process and to meet the challenges of the future.

59. The principle of a **learner-friendly environment**, which includes the following:

- Providing a healthy and secure environment to learners;
- Providing quality education relevant to learners' needs and to the requirements of the changing society;
- Providing an educational environment based on mutual rights and responsibilities, and non-discrimination between genders;
- Fostering the attitudes that enhance the values of respect, tolerance, and understanding of others;
- Promoting independent thinking and expression among learners;
- Providing committed teachers keen to discover the learners' potentials and to work for their development;
- Making this environment available and affordable to all.

60. The principle of **commitment**, which includes the following:

- High-level re-commitment at all levels of government and leadership in civil society, regional and international organizations and other partners, to renewed efforts towards meeting the basic learning needs of all, children, youth, and adults, in line with national and international goals and targets;
- Commitment by all relevant bodies to a renewed campaign for resource mobilization at all levels, global and local, to provide more innovative and equitable formulas to resolve

the problem of human and financial resources of countries in the greatest need.

- 61.** The principle of **keeping pace with technological advancements**, which includes the following:
- Considering the rapid transformations in technology of communication as a supporting factor for the provision of education, starting from basic education. Among other things, technology helps in classifying learning objectives and determining the expected performance from learners, subdividing subject matters and facilitating their presentation, individualizing learning, assessing learning and analysing learner's performance, and conducting examinations, and using distant education to get access to populations in geographically remote areas;
 - Considering the use of technology, which includes, in addition to hardware and software, the use of Arabic and of foreign languages, as indispensable to help education meet the challenges of the new century.

V. Objectives and orientations for implementation

- 62.** The Jomtien Framework for Action invited all Member States to develop their special goals and objectives in their efforts to meet the basic learning needs of children, youth and adults.
- 63.** The EFA mid-decade review meeting (Amman, 1996) emphasized five major areas of concern: improving learning achievement, mobilizing resources, developing partnerships, building national capacities and meeting the basic learning needs for all in the twenty-first century.
- 64.** With the end of the decade, it is necessary to acknowledge the difficulties facing education systems which have prevented the Jomtien goals from being achieved. Among these difficulties have been shortage of financial and human resources or their misallocation and waste, poor mobilization, the difficulties related to the management of a complex system such as education and the complexity of its relationship with other systems, the mismatch between the size of the pressure to meet the goals and the size of the exerted efforts, etc.
- 65.** The successes achieved should also be recognized and the commitment among the four major groups of partners that hold responsibility for achieving the goal in the future, i.e. governments, civil society, regional agencies and organizations, and international agencies and organizations renewed, and all have to set clear goals and objectives.

Seven objectives

- 66.** Therefore, building on the Jomtien Declaration and the present needs of the Arab States, the new objectives and targets for achieving the ultimate goal of **education for all in the Arab States** could be re-defined for the coming years (2000-2010) as follows (these objectives allow for periodical assessment of the progress achieved):
- (1) **Expanded and improved early childhood care and development**, which includes, besides providing health care, nutrition and other basic social services to young children, providing them opportunities for learning and development at educational institutions with a view to fully developing their capacities including their physical, cognitive, creative and psycho-social abilities.
 - (2) **Extending basic education and its provision to achieve high quality education leading to excellence for all children, with special emphasis on those with special needs.** This requires ensuring compulsory basic education, supporting needy families in enrolling their children in schools, categorically prohibiting child employment, and providing for the inclusion in schools of all children, including those with special needs.
 - (3) **Extended opportunities for basic education and training programmes to acquire life and vocational skills for all youth and adults.** This includes enhancing the existing non-formal learning structures, developing new ones and providing diversified forms of technical and vocational training and lifelong learning for both males and females.
 - (4) **Universalizing literacy among adolescents, and decreasing illiteracy rates among adults** by setting realistic yet still ambitious targets, which would lead to significant progress.
 - (5) **Ensuring mastery of basic learning skills and excellence for all through the empowerment of all learners to attain outstanding achievement levels that make full use of their potential, starting with the mastery of basic skills, vocational and life skills, and attaining excellence in creativity and inventiveness.** This will require improving the quality of education in all its aspects, including teachers' qualifications and conditions of employment, curricula, teaching and assessment methods, and the learning environment.
 - (6) **Full equality and effective participation in basic education for girls and women, and the elimination of gender biases and disparities in all schools and education systems.**
 - (7) **Improving educational governance and management**, which entails improving decision-making processes, accountability systems, building capacities, and extending and strengthening partnerships in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Each state sets its own targets for each of these objectives in such a manner as to allow the assessment of the progress made, reviewing these targets periodically and modifying them according to new developments.

Five orientations for implementation:

67. Five orientations for implementation constitute the approaches to be adopted at the national level towards reaching the determined objectives.

Orientation 1: Promote partnerships, which includes the following mechanisms:

- Organizing the support provided by regional and international organizations, and by bilateral and multilateral co-operation in a concerted manner and orienting it according to national priorities;
- Greater participation of civil society in designing, implementing and monitoring basic education programmes, and allowing for the participation of the private sector, NGOs, local communities and religious foundations, in the achievement of EFA goals;
- Better co-operation, exchange of information, transparency, accountability and trust amongst all partners in the process of universalizing basic education.

Orientation 2: Integrate programmes and projects, through:

- Implementing integrated health, social and educational policies. Health problems can prevent children from attending school and from learning. Ensuring that children are healthy and able to learn is especially relevant to efforts to increase enrolment and learning achievement, i.e. it encourages the poorest and most disadvantaged children to attend school and to devote the needed efforts for success;
- Incorporating all programmes for the education of children, youth and adults into an integrated national vision and linking the educational plans to the economic and social development plans within the framework of sustainable development efforts and strategies. Also, employment policies based on training, education, and the eradication of illiteracy increase the value of learning in society, with its subsequent rewards;
- Ensuring synergies between the different programmes of education, considering that adult education affects the education of children and that expanding secondary education creates incentives to expanding enrolment in primary education;
- Using all available media and technological channels in co-ordination with the efforts exerted in education.

Orientation 3: Promote knowledge-based decision-making and information for all. This includes:

- Assessing curricular objectives, contents, teaching methods, forms of evaluation and activities, and examining the needs,

aspirations and achievements of each learner through scientific research, in order to take objective decisions thereon.

- Providing society with a clear picture of educational reality, after collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant data, in order to ensure societal accountability.

Orientation 4: Mobilize all possible resources through the enhancement of national investments in education, effective use of available human and material resources, and the mobilization of support from all concerned parties (the public sector, the private sector, the local communities, non-governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral co-operation agencies and regional and international organizations) towards education for all.

Orientation 5: Enhance management and monitoring efficiency, which encompasses the following:

- Setting clear targets to be achieved at the national (and local) level, that reflect what had been agreed upon internationally and nationally, and any other commitments. These objectives should emphasize, along with quantitative aspects, the qualitative aspects, such as the levels of expected achievement in terms of knowledge and skills to be acquired, the quality of educational material and environment. These objectives must identify the categories that should receive priority;
- Designing and implementing schemes for the monitoring and assessment of curricula, and for the adjustment of processes;
- Developing the management systems, enhancing the qualifications of human resources, and building national capacities;
- Institutionalizing assessment and follow up;
- Rationalizing expenditure.

Each state is invited to develop a self-monitoring system of its commitment to each orientation proposed in this Framework for Action and of its implementation of these orientations, as well as the difficulties related to them.

VI. Priorities

Two priorities for all Arab States:

68. In view of the achievements of the Arab States collectively in the expansion of basic education (Objective 2), the problem occupying the first priority in the Arab Region as a whole is that of the quality of education. Therefore, and in accordance with the Cairo Declaration as well, **improving the quality of education is to be considered as the first priority in the Arab Framework for Action for meeting the goals of education for all at both quantitative and qualitative levels.** This means that Arab countries must aim at ensuring mastery of basic learning skills and excellence for all. In spite of all

efforts made to universalize basic education, the provision of a high-quality education remains a goal imposed by the sustainable development requirements, a positive attitude towards globalization, and the challenges of the world market competition and free trade. This priority encompasses all educational processes and skills, including the achievement by all learners of nationally defined and objectively measured levels of learning in literacy, numeracy and life skills, including technology skills, that entail open-mindedness, development of thinking, the desire for knowledge and the desire to seek knowledge from all sources. Within this priority, the emphasis goes to improving the teachers' status, including their qualifications and work conditions. The slogan for the coming years in the Arab States should be: teachers' empowerment, professionalization and training to reach the highest possible levels in scientific, professional and cultural specialization.

69. In view of the limited human and financial resources available, it is of utmost importance in the Arab States to mobilize efforts and capabilities. That will require good governance and good management, both to assist in the achievement of the quality of education and other goals, and to ensure the implementation of the determined principles adopted in the Framework for Action. Therefore, **improving educational governance and management (Objective 7) can be considered as the second priority** in the Arab Region as a whole. This includes the development of education decision-support systems and building national capacities at central, regional, and local levels, to ensure the use of knowledge in decision-making at all these levels and in all educational endeavours, from policies to planning and management of operational activities, and from mobilization of resources to monitoring and assessment of results. Within this priority the emphasis would be in the coming years on **capacity-building**.

Eradication of illiteracy: a top priority for national, regional and international mobilization

70. The Arab States, singly and jointly, are concerned with all objectives of the Arab Framework for Action. But, considering the massive and important problems facing them, whether in catching up with previous commitments or in meeting the demands of the coming century, the greatest problem for the Arab States is, in general, that of **illiteracy**. There are two reasons for this: the first relates to the number of illiterates in these countries (around 68 million, or 38.5 per cent of the population 15 years of age or older) and with the wide gender gap in literacy (Parity Index = 0.69). The second relates to the multiplier effect of literacy. Illiteracy among adults, especially women, lowers children's school enrolment and the educational achievement (quality of education) of those in school, and exacerbates failure and early school drop-out rates (effectiveness of education). Illiteracy is also associated with early marriage, high fertility and high infant mortality rates.

Illiteracy reinforces gender discrimination in society, while literacy helps improve the overall quality of life.

71. Therefore, and in accordance with the Cairo Declaration (1994), **the eradication of illiteracy is today (in the year 2000) a high priority in the Arab States for national, regional and international mobilization of resources to achieve EFA goals (Objective 4)**. For, as stated in the Cairo Declaration: 'It is impossible to imagine the development and resurgence of the Arab world without putting an end to the problem of illiteracy in all the Arab countries.' Within this priority, the emphasis goes first to the **education of girls and women**.

Two other priorities for Arab co-operation and national development

72. In view of the relative neglect of early childhood education in the Arab States and the potential of such education for the enhancement of learning achievement and improving internal efficiency in primary school, **early childhood care and development** deserves much more attention in the coming ten years, particularly in regional co-operation activities and among those states where illiteracy does not constitute a heavy burden. Efforts should be devoted both to the expansion and diversification of ECCD delivery services, and to the innovation and improvement of educational curricula, bearing in mind that early childhood care and development is not confined to pre-schooling but includes care given by the whole family from birth onwards.
73. In parallel to the above-mentioned priorities, efforts should be made to diversify delivery systems of educational services to youth and adults, in order to broaden educational opportunities. The enormous potential of new information and communication technologies should be exploited at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. In terms of educational methods, priority should be given to the **development of a multimedia environment to be used both for formal and non-formal education**, encouraging the investment in cultural industries related to teaching/learning activities.

Each Arab State has its own national priorities

74. The aforementioned sets of priorities apply to the Arab States as a whole, but it is difficult to apply to them individually. In fact, some states are close to overcoming the problem of illiteracy and the gender gap related to it. These include Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Palestine, Qatar, Kuwait and Lebanon, followed by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic. For other countries, illiteracy remains the number one challenge, and these include Egypt, the Sudan, Morocco, Mauritania and Yemen, followed by Tunisia, Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq and Oman. This discrepancy

in positions changes the scale of priorities from one group to another. The same should be said about early childhood education, where Kuwait and Lebanon are approaching full enrolment.

75. In all cases, each country is called upon to define its priorities and their sequence of importance according to the problems facing it and to review these priorities in a periodical manner according to what has been achieved. This is a necessary step to define the plan of action in each country and, in that light, to define the extent of Arab regional and international co-operation.

VII. Arab regional and international co-operation

Increasing the efficiency of Arab co-operation

76. The Arab Region is composed of twenty-one states, most of which share a common language and a common culture. Furthermore, and more important, they are bonded by a sense of belonging to one nation, in that what besets one state affects the others, and by a sense of combined strength of will for the general progress of the Arab nation. A condition for that progress is the achievement of the goals of education for all, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

77. Arab States are also brought together by Arab regional organizations concerned with the issues of co-ordination and co-operation among the different states. In the year 2000, the Arab States will renew their commitments for co-operation and their faith in its returns for all. The disparity in development levels is an additional incentive for the establishment of that co-operation. Achieving the education for all goals will be the product of their individual and collective efforts.

78. This co-operation will take place mainly through two channels:
- Bilateral and multi-lateral relations, where the exchange of information and experiences takes place, where assistance is provided, agreements are concluded, and the flow of human resources and investments is encouraged;
 - Networks, and regional and sub-regional organizations (ALECSO, ISESCO, ABEGS, AGFUND) which develop joint programmes and projects in co-operation with international organizations, and provide technical information and expertise.

79. In view of the experience of the past decade where the achievements of the Arab States, collectively and individually, did not meet the requirements, the Arab States are invited to do the following:

- (1) Assess the previous co-operation experiences through the two above-mentioned channels, to enhance co-operation in the coming years and extend the benefits derived from co-operation on everyone, including the establishment of specialized regional centres, joint programmes and projects, as well as common lists of learning competencies expected from learners.
- (2) Renew the mobilization of bilateral and multilateral co-operation. This requires that each country lists its priorities for co-operation, in terms of partners, as well as in terms of types of co-operation, capabilities to assist and the areas where assistance is needed. More developed countries are called upon to provide assistance for less developed countries.
- (3) Strengthen Arab organizations, specialized regional centres, and Arab networks and programmes. This will involve enhancing the capacities of these agencies and helping them direct their activities towards more assistance for needier countries.
- (4) Consider efforts to address shortcomings in the achievement of the set objectives of basic education in any state of the Region as a joint Arab responsibility.

Increasing the benefit of Arab-international co-operation

80. In their approach to co-operation with international institutions and organizations, especially those located in the Arab region, the Arab States should refer to the Jomtien Declaration concerning international co-operation:

- (1) **'Meeting basic learning needs constitutes a common and universal human responsibility. It requires international solidarity and equitable and fair economic relations in order to redress existing economic disparities. All nations have valuable knowledge and experiences to share in designing effective educational policies and programmes.'**
- (2) **'Substantial and long-term increases in resources for basic education will be needed. The world community, including governmental agencies and institutions, has an urgent responsibility to alleviate the constraints that prevent some countries from achieving the goals of education for all.'**

81. Arab States should also refer to the Jomtien Framework for Action on action priorities at the international level. These include:

- 1) 'Enhancing national capacities' for designing and managing programmes and services for basic education;
- 2) 'Providing sustained long-term support for national and regional actions', which includes providing 'increased international funding . . . to help the less developed countries implement their own autonomous plans for action in line with the expanded vision of basic Education for All';
- 3) 'Providing technical assistance on policy issues.'

82. Therefore, taking into consideration the experience of the past decade, Arab States call upon the international community to do the following:

- **Renew the international commitment to provide financial assistance to the less developed Arab States** that are unable, with their own resources and with those provided by Arab co-operation, to fulfil the requirements for achieving the education for all goals within the coming ten years;
- **Renew the commitment of international agencies and organizations**, especially those sponsoring the Arab Regional Conference on Education for All (Cairo), and those participating in the World Education Forum (Dakar), **to provide sustained and long-term assistance for national and Arab regional activities**, especially those linked to developing national capacities and to designing and implementing priority strategies, plans, programmes and projects for education.

83. For their part, Arab States will renew their commitment for positive interaction with international agencies and organizations, under the banner of the Jomtien Declaration, especially in the area of knowledge development and database construction. They will undertake periodical assessment studies on education in these states, in line with the goals and orientations adopted in this Arab Framework for Action.

VIII. Designing national autonomous plans for action

84. The EFA 2000 Assessment allowed each Arab State to recognize its decade's achievements and what it was unable to achieve. It helped each state to understand what prevented it from achieving the EFA goals. These countries are invited to perform such an assessment in a periodic manner.

85. The Arab Framework provides a guide for each country to work towards achieving its own targets based upon the principles, objectives, strategies, priorities and forms of Arab and international co-operation set out in this document.

86. Each Arab State is now called upon to determine a time frame for future action, identifying specific targets to be achieved by the year 2010. These targets should be phased so that at the end of each phase a new assessment could be made of what has and what has not been achieved.

87. In this respect, each Arab State is invited to define, according to its own circumstances and possibilities, the upper and lower limits that it shall strive to attain with regard to each individual EFA objective contained in this Framework for Action. It is also called upon to enshrine its commitments in official and public texts.

88. Defining objectives and targets to achieve requires more than political will and intentions. It also requires educational and scientific research reflecting the actual educational situation and examining possible action alternatives, including governance and management methods, centralization versus decentralization, public versus private sector, role of the civil society, sources of local, national, regional and international funding, forms and direction for co-operation, etc. At this stage, national stakeholders should initiate and maintain the necessary communication with other states and organizations, and survey the local human and financial resources so that planning for maximal mobilization of resources and capacities can be undertaken in a realistic manner. Based on all this, the minimum and maximum thresholds for achievement can be defined for each of the seven objectives mentioned in this Framework for Action.

89. Therefore, the Arab States are called upon to meet again in 2002 in a regional Arab Ministerial Conference, the subject of which would be education for all in the Arab States – targets for 2010. At this meeting, the Arab States, and the Arab and international organizations, could deliberate on the orientation of the national plans within the context of Arab and international support and co-operation.

90. The regional organizations and the international community are called upon to assist all Arab States to develop their autonomous plans for achieving the goals of education for all, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference proposed for 2002. ■