

## The Arab Project for the Protection of Street Children

### Theme(s):

- Gender-Based Violence

### Type of Program:

- Provision of Services/Advocacy

### Country/Region:

- Arab region

### Project Duration:

- Ongoing

### Submitting/Executing Organizations:

- The Arab Council for Childhood

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**Initiative overview:** The idea behind the initiative is to attempt to find innovative interventions to provide better direct services to street children by governmental and non-governmental organisations. The Arab Council for Childhood and Development typically focusses on the protection of street children in different ways. It aims at confronting the problems of street children by coordinating regional, national and local efforts while also supporting assistance from international programmes. The Council adopted a strategy to raise awareness, build capacity, and work with societies and victims at the same time.

**Social discriminatory practices targeted:** Street children suffer from the social perception of inferiority and condemnation. Society disapproves of them and considers them as criminals. As a result, laws have been enacted to penalise them, repress them and limit their freedom instead of protecting them. In addition, the juvenile delinquency rehabilitation process is too strict, thus leading to higher crime rates among these children. The few previous projects for providing street children services did not deal with the children from a human rights perspective.

**Socio-cultural context:** The names given to street children vary from one country to another. Some call them ‘children without families’ whereas others call them ‘homeless children’, ‘delinquents’,



‘abandoned children’, ‘very dangerous children’, ‘marginalised children’, and so on. All these names reflect different approaches to these children’s problems as well the conditions in which these children live. Street children marginalisation does not mean that they live in isolation because they establish their own societies which are governed by social relations and several survival and consumption patterns. They even have their own art and music. When these children try to interact with the world outside their own societies, they are met with harsh police treatment and social disdain.

Many factors, such as poverty, armed conflicts, internal migration and unemployment levels, contribute to the dissemination of the street children phenomena. The Arab Declaration (issued by the 1986 Conference on Childhood and Development, held in Tunis) affirms that family living standards in the Arab region are the most important factor in assessing children’s economic conditions.

Many studies confirm that street children usually belong to families that generate income from informal economic activities. Some of these studies relate the phenomenon to school dropout rates resulting from limited governmental support for educational services or the absence of good education programmes. Others link the phenomenon to domestic violence and family break-ups.

In addition, precise data and statistics on street children in the Arab region are lacking. The available statistics indicate the presence of 277 street children in Syria and thousands of them in Lebanon (including foreign ones). There are 63,600 street children in Palestine, 7,000 in Yemen, 93,500 in Egypt, 85,000 in Sudan, and 234,000 in Morocco. In Jordan street children are almost non-existent. Because of gender discrimination, street girls suffer twice as much as the boys from social rejection. They are exploited in street children’s communities. They are particularly vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation.

**National laws and policies:** In 1986, a number of conferences yielded concrete results. The Charter on the Rights of the Arab Child and the Education and Teaching Strategy were produced. There was Arab participation in two international conferences on children in 1992 and 2002. The Arab Council for Childhood and Development was established in 1987. These efforts resulted from the interest of governments in child protection and the number of health and social studies undertaken in several Arab countries in cooperation with the League of Arab States, UNICEF, and the Arab Council for Childhood and Development. Ministries and funds were created to this end.

## Objectives and Goals

The Council adopted a participatory approach in planning, implementing and monitoring the initiative. It also adopted an approach based on child rights as a basis in all phases. The specific objectives of the initiative are as follows:

- Establish a database on the conditions of street children in the region.
- Start with regional studies to assess the existing programmes.
- Raise awareness about the issue in the various countries.
- Contribute to improving the services provided by the existing programmes and consolidating national coordination.
- Create innovative direct intervention methods.
- Coordinate the deployed efforts at the regional and national levels in order to enable experience sharing with similar programmes in different countries.
- Support the ongoing efforts through capacity building.
- Work closely with the involved governments to decide on laws and policies, and ratify intervention mechanisms.

## Good Practices

### Innovative Approach

- The initiative will coordinate efforts to benefit from ongoing programmes. It will endeavour to diversify partners and the adopted work mechanisms in the design and implementation phases in the various covered countries. The aim is to adopt various means to investigate the problem of social attitudes towards the family, the society and the children themselves, and their interaction with economic and educational positions.
- The initiative interventions include the following:
  - Interventions in the streets and at the level of the social institutions that provide direct services to children, and work on sensitising street children about available opportunities so that they can enjoy a better life
  - Social interventions for consolidating the spirit of cooperation and solidarity
  - Interventions at the level of institutions to urge dealing with the poverty problem and the issue of child rights protection in laws and policy plans
  - Adoption of a complementary approach of open dialogue and participation on these issues among the various stakeholders, service providers, non-governmental organisations, governmental organisations, families, and so on

## Participatory Approach

- The initiative methodology is based on a comprehensive strategy aimed at ensuring the participation of all the involved parties, playing a direct or indirect role, in the implementation phases. The success of the initiative lies in ensuring street children's participation in all design and implementation phases – a fact that needs to be well considered.

## Overcoming Challenges

The initiative faced a number of challenges including:

- **Funding:** This challenge was overcome by mobilising a larger partner network and focussing on those who own long-term basic resources. A fund-raising music concert was organised in Egypt. Similar concerts have been planned in other countries but are still awaiting implementation.
- **Determining criteria for selecting initiative partners (such as governmental and non-governmental organisations):** This challenge was overcome by adopting general criteria. For example, determining country selection criteria is based on whether the country has non-governmental organisations with expertise in dealing with street children. The selection criteria for non-governmental organisations are based on their expertise in this area, in addition to other criteria such as political party affiliation, tribal membership, intervention projects in major cities, and resource ownership, and are necessary in order to effectively participate in the initiative.

Independent, experienced and active non-governmental organisations in the covered countries were selected. In addition, the countries were supposed to present various models. For example, the rapid interaction with the government in Sudan facilitated the initiative implementation there. But in Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon and Yemen, no models have been presented yet.

## Overcoming Challenges

- The initiative succeeded in mobilising public opinion through media campaigns organised by governments and non-governmental organisations, and meetings with local leaders. Exhibitions were organised. News bulletins and flyers were published. Advertisements, targeting large audiences, were disseminated.
- The initiative strategies caught the interest of decision-makers in the countries covered by the initiative.
- A large number of non-governmental organisations were mobilised and participated in different meetings.
- Several meetings were held with health, literacy and training centres.

- Several communication channels were prepared for the social service providers, including:
  - Opening welcome centres for street children
  - Opening educational centres for providing literacy and training programmes
  - Establishing new fieldwork methods to directly deal with street children, rather than using traditional methods from the past
- Precaution measures were established to limit the proliferation of the street children phenomenon, including:
  - Programmes for supporting the income of street children's families
  - Development programmes for poor and marginalised areas
  - Provision of a monthly allocation for families with school-age children
  - Call for amending national laws and policies on street children
- The initiative activities gave the opportunity to street children to express their needs and interests in order to prepare appropriate programmes, such as the Egyptian Friends Group, so that the children can help each other and choose to improve their behaviour and living conditions.
  - Communication was adopted as part of the programme of the advisory social committee to consolidate communication as a whole and assist in creating networks for consolidating the services provided to street children.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- Evaluation indicators were determined for the initiative phases of initial thinking and elaboration:

### **For non-governmental organisations, party to the initiative:**

- Drafting regular reports on implementation progress
- Preparing annual budgets
- Preparing an annual report on activities and evaluating them by relying on a regional framework for all the partners
- Organising field visits by Arab Council representatives
- Undertaking a comprehensive evaluation every six months

### **For regional and international partners:**

- Regular reports and inspection by the Arab Council
- Regular financial reports
- Regular meetings with the partners
- Quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess all the phases

## Quantitative Indicators

- Integrate 5,000 children into the initiative activities by the end of 2009 in five countries.
- Establish legal standards based on international standards for the protection of street children from violence, provide legal support for the children, and urge decision makers to enforce such standards.
- Use the various media to present a different picture of street children by presenting role models, in addition to promoting sports programmes, cultural activities and stories that portray positive examples of street children.
- Establish a database on street children in the region and a network of non-governmental organisations, university institutions and social security networks in the local community to encourage the integration of the issue of child rights into government agendas.

## Ensuring Continuity

- Review plans with the best available methods and establish monitoring and evaluation indicators to ensure communication within the participating organisations.

## Contribution to Social Transformation

- Although the indicators of social transformation have not been assessed, the initiative encourages students and researchers in the various institutions to study their impact on social transformation.

## Lessons for Replication

Several lessons have been learned and can be replicated:

- Adopting a comprehensive participatory framework in the phases of incentive design, implementation and development
- Encouraging the replication of best practices in other regions and building on the developed models
- Devoting time to analysing the intellectual and practical considerations of the intervention projects for the benefit of street children
- Encouraging students and researchers to integrate the issue into their agendas and study it
- Ensuring that there is a positive attitude towards all the activities to urge the partners to continue working and to disseminate hope among them