Arab Resource Collective (ARC)

Arab Network for Early Childhood Development
Follow-up Meeting, Jordan, April 20-22, 2016
With the support of Open Society Foundation
Facilitated by Nabila Espanioli and Youssef Hajjar

Narrative Report Executive Summary
By Rania SAHELI

Background and Context

In December 2014, the Founding Forum of the Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD) was convened in Jordan. Representatives of ministries of education and social affairs, childhood councils, non-governmental organizations and academia, as well as individual experts attended the Forum and came from 15 Arab and foreign countries. The forum was the last "event" of the Arab Program of Early Childhood Development (APECD) that lasted for three years, 2012-2014. APECD was hosted by the Arab Resource Collective (ARC), under the umbrella of the Arab Regional Agenda for Improving Education Quality (ARAIEQ) based at the Arab League's Education, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and funded by the World Bank.

Nevertheless, the efforts undergone by ARC in order to activate and deploy ANECD succeeded in ensuring a real potential to sustain it and re-organize the efforts of the partners who had expressed eagerness and support during the Founding Forum and beyond.

The Forum had declared the December 2014 meeting as the "Founding Assembly" of the Arab Network for Early Childhood Development and mandated the steering team to act as a Follow up Committee. The Forum had also produced a document summarizing the outcomes of the meeting and establishing a roadmap for the deployment of ANECD. In addition, the Follow up Committee and ARC drafted a "Reference Document" in order to facilitate the elaboration of the concept, role, and structure of ANECD.

The "Reference Document" was based on the roadmap agreed upon during the Founding Assembly as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) issued by the United Nations in 2015. It contains two sections:

Section 1: Defining the global and regional context and strategic priorities of ECD

Section 2: ANECD structure, including concept, membership, governance, program, funding, and budget.

Objectives of the Follow-up Meeting

As for *this* follow-up meeting, the suggested objectives were the following:
- To review the context and work program for ANECD:
  - o To review the strategic priorities for ECD in the Arab region
  - o To reflect on the programmatic components of ANECD work
  - o To plan for the Training of Trainers workshop on the Science of ECD
- To design and initiate a process for the following:
  - o ANECD membership
  - o ANECD governance structures
  - o ANECD legal status and by-laws
- To make necessary arrangements for ANECD secretariat, including its administrative base, staffing and funding.

Summary of the Meeting Proceedings

After ARC efforts to sustain the deployment of ANECD were met with initial success, the follow-up committee of the Founding Assembly (December 2014) started preparations for this ANECD Follow-up Committee meeting in Jordan, April 20-12, 2016. The preparatory team initiated by ARC appointed Mr. Youssef Hajjar as the facilitator of the meeting, and most of the preparations were done electronically until the team met face-to-face to put the "last touches" to the agenda, on the eve of the meeting in Jordan. Other participants joined to constitute the steering team of the meeting.
ANECD Follow-up Committee meeting took place by the Dead Sea, Jordan, April 20-22, 2016, and it was attended by 38 participants, most of whom were present at the "Founding Assembly" in December 2014, and/or participated in at least one previous activity of APECD. They came from ministries, childhood councils, non-governmental organizations, regional and international agencies, and academia, as well as individual experts, from Arab and foreign countries.

The first day of the meeting started with a short welcome by Doctor Ghassan Issa, General Coordinator of ARC and current director of ANECD, who briefly reviewed the process that led to this meeting. Mrs. Alice Keirouz, President of ARC – Lebanon, inaugurated the meeting stressing the role of each participant as an added value to the success of this endeavor. Introducing the participants and a review of their expectations were shared through an exercise. Participants volunteered to join the steering team to facilitate this meeting and the documentation team who helped in the preparation of this report. Youssef Hajjar presented the suggested agenda and the rationale behind it.
In the second session of the first day, country representatives presented the early childhood strategies of their countries, focusing on the challenges they face. Presentations were from Oman, Yemen, Lebanon, Tunisia, Palestine, Sudan, Morocco and Jordan. Later in the afternoon, the participants worked in five groups to answer the question: "How the Network could help to address the challenges mentioned above through the following five topics: 1) national strategies

and policies, 2) knowledge and human resources, 3) quality standards, 4) advocacy and networking, and 5) emergency and difficult circumstances.

Groups reported to the plenary, and the facilitator of the meeting asked them to re-group and select one top priority and indicate the mechanisms to achieve it.

The proceedings of **the second day** started with additional discussions about the priorities listed at the end of the first day. Followed a number of presentations starting with a program called "Curriculum" from Jordan. Then, Sheila Manji from the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva presented via Skype the course of Science of Early Childhood Development (SECD), and ARC presented its ECD training pack. The session ended with a general discussion about resources, particularly SECD, and its relevance to the region.

In the second session, ANECD Reference Document second section was briefly presented, and participants were asked to split into three groups to work on the following three parts of the document and propose amendments and/or additions: 1) ANECD vision, mission, and objectives, 2) membership, and 3) governance. The three groups, suggestions and amendments were discussed in plenary. Some issues were agreed upon, while others remained "under discussion".

In the last session of the second day, Yasmin Serali, from the "Mother and Child Education Foundation", AÇEV, presented the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC). Then, via Skype from New York, Dr. Pia Britto, ECD Senior Adviser at UNICEF, presented "ECD in the Sustainable Development Goals, 2015-2030".

The day ended with a general discussion, followed by meetings of the documentation team and the steering committee. The latter met for long hours to come up with a framework of issues to suggest in the plenary during the last day in order to reach concrete decisions related to ANECD.

The third day started with a brief recapitulation by the documentation team of the second day. Then, Nabila Espanioly (ARC trustee and this meeting facilitator) moderated the discussion within the plenary to "concretize" the basic framework for ANECD.

The last session of the third day was considered *the first formal meeting of the Arab Network for Early Childhood Development*, on Friday April 22, 2016. The meeting agreed on a proposal for he logo of the Network and provisional decision-making mechanisms until the formalization of ANECD.

The plenary agreed on the formation of a **follow-up task force** to coordinate the coming tasks and the pending issues. It includes the members of the steering committee and documentation team as well as a number of volunteers among the participants.

Specific working groups were also formed on the following tasks:
- **Training of trainers on SECD, around November 2016**
- **Website and digital newsletter**
- **Fund raising**
- **Work on the SDGs**

At the end of the Meeting, participants shared some reflections about the past three days, expressing appreciation of ARC efforts and the ambiance it creates. They also showed commitment to ANECD and to the best interest of the child in the Arab region.