# ARAB YOUTH ISSUES

## "Arab Youth Dominant Values: Characteristics and Determinants "

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**Executive Summary**

SERIES ON POPULATION & DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

# Executive Summary

This report is the second publication of the "Youth Arab Issues" series on the theme "Arab Youth Dominant Values: Characteristics and Determinants". It is part of the activties of the Arab Youth Empowerment Project executed by the Population Policies and MIgration Department in the Social Sector at the League of Arab States in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In this summary we introduce the content of the report starting with the conceptual framework of the report, followed by the report goals, queries, methodology, and data resources and ending with the main conclusions.

## First: Conceptual framework (Report theory):

The report departs from a basic axiom: that it is difficult - on the level of action and practice - to separate what is related to youth values and what is related to institutions, experiences and social relations these youth deal with.

Values are not abstracts launched out of the social context. They are reference points Arab youth evoke- individually and collectively - to justify their positions, choices and preferences, what they deem just and unjust and right and wrong., and these reference points are manifested through detectable practice.

Reference points are defined by the circumstances of social existence that youth interact with, such as: education, career, socio-economic status, culture (urban/ rural), in addition to the role of institutions (family/ school/ media/ other..). These institutions are not vessels empty of content and codes of conduct, rather the content is affected by a social context that has its own chart of power and wealth distribution, and historical and modern repercussions that contribute in shaping value reference points for youth.

Although youth are a social group like any other group influenced by the changes taking place in their social context, they have a qualitative status since some of them live today the values of the future because they are more keen to change, and look forward to achieving their goals of which not much has been fulfilled.

While it is true that youth have common values, there are discrepancies among them. And the cieling of such discrepancy is determined by the pattern of social opportunity distribution among them, based on the socio-economic status, the type of local community they function in (urban capital/ smaller city/ marginalized urban region/ or rural area). For example, if we take a closer look at the discrepancy of values among Arab youth on a gender basis, we will find that social values put pressure on females than males.

Even though Arab societies approve female education, and may accept females sharing the economic burden, some societies stipulate that females should not mingle with males as a condition to allow them to work, and hence most females chose a teaching career. In addition to that , some Arab social classes do not welcome the presence of females in public work on the pretext that it affects their role in the household.

Values have explicit and implicit dimensions defined by cultural codes that determine what could be said and what could not, and Arab societies are no different. This is illustrated in the allocated space to what could be said and could not which is very very limited to the females in comparsion to the males, which is one of the problemes of studying values that can onky be overcome by a creative methodology to identfy the implicit values.

There is a challenge in studying youth vales: who is qualified to study these values and how to be objective when studying them.

We did not take into consideration the classical answer that researchers alone are fit to carry out such studies, especially that they rely on theoritical and methodological approaches that have been subject to strict scientific critera when chosen. Reasons for this are many of which are the following: is there any convergence in social sciences free from any ideological bias? Is there a social science free of all ideological values and visions, as some social scientist like Max Freire and Emile Durkheim claim?

What we intend is to study of the values of both the youth and the elderly of youth values interms of prefrences and practices, we do not mean by elderly only parents but any figure of authority or in the position of decision making, for it is the latter who are requested to delegate part of their authority and power to the youth in order to integrate them in decision making process.

This report took into consideration globalization , with all that it encompasses in terms of accomplishments,  threats, opportunities and challanges, as one of the necessary dimensions and determinants in understanding Arab youth values. Hence,  it is one of the fundamental levels when analyzing the larger space affecting youth preferences, since empirically Arab youth are the most affected by the accomplishments of globalization in comparison with older generations.

In addition to that, the political, economic and cultural repercussions of globalization imposed on youth an number of important challanges, especially issues pertaining to career, marriage, participation, identity and aspiration to migration.

In this context, the chapeters of the report illustrate that although youth face unemployment due to globalization, it also opened venues, for an increasing number of them, to education, distance-jobs, and it offered - through the Internet - the possibility of constructing perfect virtual worlds to express their opinions, interests and to dialogue with other youth, to confront obstacles and taboos that had prevented them from expressing themselves with their parents, educators and employers.

And in addressing the above mentioned, the report did not neglect the transformations taking place in the Arab societies due to the impact of globalization which were manifested in open market policies and adaptation to global capitalism, as demonstrated by investments in the fields of education, and healthcare.

The report demonstrates in what follows, the convergence of economic production and the production of value systems (socially, politically, esthetic ), for they both share relativity, effectiveness, and creative energy and even in creating symbols ie. the ability to generate values and to coat products with connotations, symbols and ads in order to promote them among people. A combination of political, cultiural factors - regional and global - joined together to transform the most popular values among the youth.

**Second: Report goals and queries:**

The report seeked to achieve a set of  scientific and operational goals to develop  youth empowerment policies in order to activate youth participation in population and development policies.Most important was contributing in collecting, analyzing and explaining the values of Arab youth, in order to provide data and information to update related databases.

Report queries:

Within the pre-determined goals, some questions were posed to shape these goals:

**First:**
1. What are the most coomon values of Arab youth?
2. What are the goals of these values and the mneans to accomplish them?
3. What are the priority values to youth, what is their vertical  sequence and what is the horizontal inter-relation between these values?

**Second:**
1. What are the common values trends among youth: classic, or modern, or post-modern, or a blend of all three?

**Third: Report methodology and Data resources:**

Besides analyzing the data of previous youth related studies, the report depended on research papers executed by some experts, in addition to a field study on a samples of both Egyptian and Tunisian youth to address the loopholes in available data and to update them.

**Fourth: Field study outcome:**

Index of common values among Arab Youth

| Values | % Egypt | | % Tunisia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| preferring governmental jobs | 31.9 | 49.3 | 44 | 60 |
| revenue of a job is more important | 55.7 | 44.6 | 52 | 50 |
| mutual understanding as key to a successful marriage | 24.7 | 37.2 | 49 | 56 |
| Pious partner as a key to a successful marriage | 61.3 | 44.4 | 5 | 8 |
| tolereance as a key to a successful marriage | 42.1 | 46.5 | 31 | 38 |
| love as a key to a successful marriage | 26.8 | 21.4 | 88 | 36 |
| decision to marry taken by the youth themselves | 66.4 | 40.9 | 61.6 | 72.3 |
| economic problems delays marriage | 72.8 | 91.9 | 45 | 42 |

The previous diagram shows that there is a consensus regarding the content of youth values. Even though there seems to be a superficial preference, in depth they are more intermingling and complementary concerning youth rights, goals and needs.

Although more than half of the sample (Egypt/Tunisia) focused on job revenues; mutual understanding and tolerance were of the main reasons for a successful marriage.

The data illustrates clearly a difference in the priorities of Egyptian and Tunisian youth; Egyptian youth influenced by religious consciousness , the rising trend of religious values and the increasing changes in values and morals, focused on a pious partner as a key to a sucessful marriage, while Tunisian youth focused on love and mutual understanding as a key to a sucessful marriage.

If we conisder obedience as one of the main components of the Arab value system we notice that it is more present in Arab households and in the relation between youth and governmental institutions that Arab youth pass through during their life cycle (school/jobs/political system), because the political, economic and cultural foundations of these institutions still effectively reproduces obedience.

But this value in the future is expected to be replaced by the values of dialogue and mutual respect on the family level and with peers.

Although the perfect image of youth from a parent's prospective is a straight A student, ethically committed, physically sound, obedient and non-argumentative and obedient, this image can be adjusted if parents focus not merely on youth duties and responsibilities but also finds ways to synchronize that with the basic rights of youth.

The report shows - whether in the chapter pertaining to family values or to participation values - that youth aspire to a different value model that is based on freedom of decision, responsibility, relative independence according to the different stages of education, preparation and work.

In both samples of this study, youth are inclined towards values of independence, freedom and objectivity. They also realizes the importance of money to fulfill needs, and love to sustain relationships. Hence, they tend to adopt modern and post-modern values, with a disparity in ratio among Egyptian and Tunisian youth.

Index of family determinant values:

| Values | % Egypt | | % Tunisia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| satisfaction with parental relation | 87.6 | 62.3 | | |
| a successful dad is an understanding dad | 34.9 | 44.6 | 26 | 45 |
| a successful dad encourages dialogue | 22.1 | 21.4 | 44 | 26 |
| a successful dad involves the family in decision making | 15.3 | 18.3 | 13 | 11 |

Given the fact that during education youth are not independent from their families, we notice that there is a conscious effort to balance between individualistic values and collective values of the family.

As most youth can't afford such independence, if not economically then psychologically, we notice that some values among youth are beginning to take different meanings. Parental values such as modesty, bless and luck are beginning to be replaced with ambition in education, work, money and rational thinking, which is is closer to youth values of modern and post modern values in the samples under study.

**Modernity rational & materialistic values:**

| Values | % Egypt | | % Tunisia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Males** | **Females** | **Males** | **Females** |
| good education qualifies for a job | 43.4 | 36.2 | 27 | 28 |
| education develops character | 25.9 | 35.3 | 19.5 | 15.5 |
| good education helps to be more open-minded | 3.4 | 4.6 | 11.5 | 13 |
| good education develops independence | 10.6 | 51 | 30 | 13 |
| a successful young man is independent | 25.9 | 35.8 | 45 | 57 |
| the preferred job is the one with high revenue | 55.7 | 44.6 | 50 | 52 |

The data here reinforces the value of education that prepares for pursuing a career, and higher-profitable jobs. It also reinforces the correlation between success and independence, which all illustrates the need of youth to achieve independence.

The rejection of education in its current form is higher among females than males, as females have an understanding that higher education is not suitable for them since they are not given the same opportunties in their majors (nursing/education/humanitarian studies) as males, which leads to a gap in the production rate in ratio to males.

In the Egyptian youth, 64.5% of females and 45% males chose their major, while 35.3% of females and 25.9% of males perceive that good education qualifies them for jobs.

In the Tunisian youth, 37.8% of females and 29.1% of males want to change their majors; while 15.5% of females and 19.5% of males said that good education develops the character.

There is a significant difference in the values of males to that of females, as it originates from the gap of gender inequality. The field study showed that females prefer education that enhances their personality as a reaction to the stereotype proclaimed by society and they also prefer governmental jobs, as working in the private sector don't sustain a long-term job, and the private sector prefer males to females due to maternity leaves, in addition to daily work span that may reach 12 hours, which affects their households.

With regard to the deision of marrying to be taken by the youth themselves, the preference of such a choice in the Egyptian sample reached 43.6% among females and 66.4% among males; but it there was a different outcome in the Tunisian sample :72.3% among females and 61.6% among males, which is considered a call of protest and a need for self-assurance among Tunisian females.

One of the most important primary results of this study that needs further scientific accreditation in the synoptic network of values is divided into two categories:

The horizontal distribution of values conintuity which can be measured and the second is the expression of preferences and priorities of values, which is expressed qualitatively.

In the first category, many of the youth goals are not yet fulfilled due to the age phase in terms of education, work and marriage, which still need to be achieved.

But the vertical sequenceof youth values may be divided into consecutive pairs from the top priority downward.In the top priority came freedom and independence, as it is associated with being an adult. Next in place came pragmatic needs like money, which made youth choose qualitative education to qualify them to jobs, especially in globalization related jobs.

Marriage was seen among females as a way to independence from family hegemony.

Youth have varied values regarding their participation in family and society affairs, but they face some obstacles in terms of communication with their families and societies. Hence, some youth avoid confrontation with the parents and prefer their friends and particapation via the Internet. Some youth mentioned that they seek the internet as a way to avoid dealing with their families, and some hide their actions to please their parents.

| Values | Egypt % | | Tunisia % | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Males | Females | Males | Females |
| participation in student activities | 48.9 | 55.8 | 47 | 36 |
| I reject being an NGO board member | 57.4 | 57.4 | 66 | 60 |
| I have no voting card | 47.7 | 66.5 | 48 | 51 |
| participation in parliamentary elections | 18 | 51 | 26 | 22 |
| youth don't participate in politics | 53.6 | 54 | | |
| youth don't trust in political participation | 50 | 44 | 29 | 26 |
| not participating due to not knowing ways of particpation | | | 20 | 26 |

On the issue of preferences and priorties of participation values, most of the youth prefer to get their information from NGOs rather than from organized political work because the NGOs offer them the opportunity of independence in expression, and developing skills and self esteem compared to organized political work that is still being controlled by the elderly who posses power and authority.

The table shows illustrates that there is information and preferred behaviour among the youth that could be dealt with especially encouraging youth to participate and to develop their capabilities and skills in that area.

These are some of the conclusions that the report addressed with the aim of drawing the attention of the reader to them in order to discuss and pose issues and ideas regarding Arab youth values. Hence, the report seeks scientific informative dialogue on youth issues especially that values are a gateway into understanding the reality of Arab youth inorder to solve their problems and address their challenges.