

Child Rights Regional Programme

"CRC Alternative Reporting and Follow - Up on Concluding Observations in Arab Countries"

Executive Summary

Of the report on a regional workshop held in Brummana between Sept 28th 2005 and Dec. 1st 2005

The Arab Resource Collective (ARC), in collaboration with Save the Children Sweden (SCS) and Save the Children Denmark (SCD), held a regional workshop entitled **"CRC Alternative Reporting and Follow -Up on Concluding Observations in Arab Countries"** between 28/9/2005 and 1/10/2005 at Le Crillon Hotel in Broummana, Lebanon.

The workshop was based on research studies conducted in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen and Jordan that examine the processes of CRC reporting and follow-up on concluding observations.

The workshop aimed at strengthening NGO capacity through the exchange of regional experiences and lessons learnt as regards the processes of alternative reporting and follow-up on concluding observations. It also aimed at promoting the application of reporting procedures and improving networking among NGOs to further develop reporting practices in the region.

Seventeen (17) persons from local and international NGOs working in 5 countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, OPT, Yemen) participated in the workshop. The major theme of the workshop was the evolution of the reporting process into a vibrant national process that includes diverse actors within government, civil society and inter-governmental organizations.

The workshop focused on the application of reporting procedures in the Arab countries. It highlighted the CRC Committee working mechanisms with Dr. Hatem Kotrane of the CRC committee. This committee monitors the implementation of the CRC and the two Optional Protocols by State parties that ratified the CRC through the examination of State reports and NGO alternative reports, after which it issues 'concluding observations' (CO). These concluding observations serve as a tool for follow-up to insure implementation, as a tool for monitoring to assess change and as a tool for advocacy to promote change.

CRC reporting has developed into a national process that examines child-related issues and includes diverse actors, among which are government agencies, civil society organizations and international organizations. It is a process that is intended to be a tool for policy development and planning, in addition to the enhancement of the implementation of the CRC obligations undertaken by states; it is not to be regarded as a mere bureaucratic fulfilment of the article 45(a) requirement.

The workshop also highlighted the role of NGOs with Mr. Tom Hewitt of CRIN. The contribution of NGOs to the reporting process depicts civil society's position on the state's representation of the child rights situation; it includes independent information on violations of child human rights, and highlights shortcomings in government policy and practice. NGOs can also play a major role in raising public awareness about CRC content and mechanisms; they can integrate respect for the standards set out in the CRC into their own policies, programmes and planning documents, and advocate for the necessary measures to be taken by relevant authorities to ensure that the standards of the CRC are respected in practice.

The NGO Group on CRC was presented by Ms. Denise Allen from CRC NGO Group. It is a coalition of international non-governmental organizations that work towards the promotion, monitoring and implementation of the CRC. The overall work of the NGO Group is facilitated by the Coordinating Committee under which two projects, namely the Liaison Unit and the Focal Point on Sexual Exploitation of Children, fall.

NGOs and the CRC Committee have played an essential role in inducing governments to observe their obligations, and have increased governments' compliance to submit high-quality transparent reports. Alternative reports submitted to CRC Committee by national NGOs are considered to be analytical supplements to State parties' reports; they provide

alternative information to the State party report's on the implementation of each of the CRC provisions. The concluding observations (CO) issued by the CRC Committee after examining the State report act as a reference for analysing the country's progress over the reporting period, and for advocacy towards legislative and policy reforms.

The workshop paid special attention to the participants' experiences regarding the reporting process, as well as child participation in reporting and follow-up on concluding observations. The workshop also presented a research study on CRC and alternative reporting in Arab countries. A national action plan for each country was set at the end of the workshop.

Through participant presentations, the workshop tackled the reporting experiences of the Arab NGOs, their achievements and needs and challenges faced in the reporting process, in addition to lessons learnt and follow-up on concluding observations.

According to these presentations, the Arab NGOs used various CRC monitoring methods. They investigated cases of child rights violations, met victims, collected information from government officials, parliament proceedings, government statistics, books and periodicals, national newspapers, and research reports and findings relevant to child rights issues. They also examined legislation and national policies and budgets allocated to children.

The participants established that the reporting process starts by a general meeting of stakeholders, who then set an action plan and assign tasks according to relevance. They start by reviewing the State report then collecting relevant data and information. Afterwards the drafting committee drafts the report, to be discussed between the stakeholders who introduce their comments and additions. Finally, the alternative report is sent to the CRC NGO group.

The participants displayed a set of common practices in the follow-up on concluding observations. These related to advocacy activities to change legislation and implement policies and plans for child rights, building coalitions or networks with other stakeholders and social actors, initiating projects that implement certain rights, promoting awareness on CRC and ensuring child participation.

The workshop discussions revealed a unanimous agreement on the importance of regular and ongoing monitoring to ensure continuous and regular access to data. The discussions also stressed the importance of collaboration between NGOs, and the need to develop monitoring and reporting skills. Another prominent issue was that of children of minority groups and refugee children in Arab countries.

The participants discussed many obstacles that faced NGO reporting in the Arab Countries

- Absence of relevant information, statistics and data
- Difficult access to information, especially to government statistics
- Absence of a monitoring system
- 'Politicization' of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in front of the Committee
- Poor monitoring skills
- Lack of funding
- Poor availability of experts or experienced resource persons in report-writing
- Occasional/non-continuous monitoring efforts
- Hesitancy or Obstruction by governments
- Poor regional input in national reports
- Poor child participation
- Poor coordination among the NGOs and poor NGOs willingness
- NGO political and religious linkages
- Hidden agendas of INGOs
- Difficulties in addressing taboo issues

A number of recommendations were reached at the end of the workshop

- The importance of setting of CR monitoring “systems” whether on local, national or regional levels, to ensure continuous and regular flow of information relating to children
- The importance of joint action and involvement of all stakeholders (NGOs, INGOs, UN, Donors, children, and all duty bearers)
- Ensuring child participation
- Extensive report dissemination on the national level (State report, alternative report and concluding observations)
- Increasing awareness and training in CRC monitoring and reporting procedures, as well as advocacy and follow-up on concluding observations to ensure the implementation of the CRC and the concluding observations and the setting of a National Plan of Action

The workshop was evaluated through Pre and *Post* tests and an evaluation form. The *pre* and *post* tests displayed good participant knowledge of the reporting process. However, they uncovered some misconceptions, chiefly concerning the role of NGOs in CRC monitoring, reporting and follow-up on concluding observations. The *post* test results showed that participants had –by the last day- formed a clearer and comprehensive picture on CRC reporting mechanisms, the role of children, the follow-up on concluding observations, the relations to the government apparatus and obstacles and how to overcome them.

The final written evaluation of the participants revealed high levels of interest and an adequate level of satisfaction. The workshop agenda was topic-extensive, but more time would have been needed to fully cover them all. The participants highly appreciated the exchange of knowledge and experiences, the resource persons input and the concrete action plans. Complaints focused on the tight time of sessions and the distribution of the sessions subject to the tight schedule of the resource persons.

At the end of the workshop, the participants agreed on an Arabic term designated to the alternative report, *Al-Takreer Mowazi*, التقرير الموازي, to mean parallel report.