



### **Disabilities & Inclusion in Kuwait: A success story**

The State of Kuwait plays a significant and leading role amongst Arab States in terms of awareness, advocacy and recognition of disabilities and inclusion and in 1996, a "Disability Law" was officially passed which paved the way for the creation of "The Higher Council for the Disabled Affairs (HCDA)". There are currently 27,000 registered persons with disabilities in Kuwait benefiting from a diverse range of benefits and services that guarantee their inclusion as well as positive contribution to the Kuwaiti society.

The UNDP country office in Kuwait has been very actively supporting the Government of Kuwait's continuous plans to raise the Standards of primary education to reach the 2nd MDG Goal to **Achieve Universal Primary Education** as well as maximize the support and enabling of individuals with disability in Kuwait. It is especially important to note the strong and growing role that civil society, in particular disabled persons organizations, are playing in this process.

UNDP Kuwait is very proud to have been part of the many contributing factors of success to Kuwait's leading role in the field of disabilities and inclusion via its Early Learning Challenges (ELC) Programme executed collaboratively with its national partner, the Supreme Council for Planning & Development. The ELC Programme has been ongoing for some 7 years now and has managed to achieve a strong impact on the inclusion and disabilities scene in Kuwait. In 2002, one of the national beneficiaries, Kuwait Dyslexia Association concluded a two-year survey study of developmental dyslexia and reading disorders and concluded that around 6.29% of students attending primary, intermediary and secondary schools (both mainstream and private) are dyslexics. The survey study was completed in 24 months and is, thus far, the only survey study conducted across the whole Arab World which highlights the alarming prevalence rate of dyslexia in Kuwait.

UNDP further provided technical assistance to KDA to develop Arabic localized computer-based tool for the early identification of at risk Kuwaiti Arabic speaking children: The Cognitive Profiling System (CoPS). The tool is the only one of its kind in the Arab World that is used to identify at risk individuals starting from the ages of 4 years till 8 years and 11 months, thus providing, for the first time, a valid and reliable computerized tool in Arabic to be used by kindergarten and early schools years in Kuwait. In 2007, the project was completed and the tool became available for use in nurseries and schools across Kuwait. Phases of this project were also documented in published papers and articles in both Arabic & English as well as in presentations at international conferences<sup>1</sup>.

The impact of the rigorous awareness campaign initiated by the UNDP and its national beneficiaries on disabilities encouraged the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education to establish a Dyslexia Higher Educational Committee to raise awareness of dyslexia in mainstream schools in Kuwait and also encouraged the Kuwaiti National Committee of the UNESCO who started Dyslexia Friendly Schools Project in the schools affiliated with the UNESCO in Kuwait and in collaboration with the British Dyslexia Association. From April 2005 till June 2006 alone, the ELC Project helped various beneficiaries in Kuwait conducting 37 public lectures and talks, 4

<sup>1</sup> The First Egyptian Conference on Dyslexia, February 17th–19th 2005, Cairo, Egypt/ The Regional Conference on Learning Disabilities in Amman, Jordan in July 2005.

National TV appearances, 2 Radio contributions "including one with BBC World Service in Arabic" in addition to innumerable media and press interviews. From April 2005 till June 2006, five general training courses on learning disabilities were delivered as part of the ELC project in addition to 2 specific training courses and 5 workshops. 11 issues of two Arabic and English dedicated magazines (the first in the Arab World have now been produced to the ELC Project as well as a dedicated documentary (I Learn in a Different Way) which is also appeared in both English & Arabic.

In 2005, a paper was published in English by the UNDP expert working on the ELC Project entitled: "Dyslexia in Arabia: The Kuwait story", which clearly highlighted the role of the UNDP and the ELC Project in raising awareness, building capacity and improving the situation for dyslexia in Kuwait and the Gulf region<sup>2</sup>. Work and research studies resulted from the ELC Project were presented at six international conferences around the world:

- A. July 2005, 3rd International Multilingualism & Dyslexia Conference, Limasol, Cyprus.
- B. November 2005, 56th Annual Conference of the International Dyslexia Association, Denver, Colorado, USA.
- C. March 2006, 5th Dubai International Rehabilitation Forum, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
- D. September 2006, 3rd International Conference on Spatial Cognition, Rome, Italy.
- E. November 2006, 57th Annual Conference of the International Dyslexia Association's, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.
- F. November 2006, International Conference on Learning Disabilities, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

UNDP, via its ELC Programme, has helped organize the first ever Early Learning Challenges Workshop Series (4 Workshops in total) and building capacity amongst various beneficiaries within Kuwait. The media coverage of these Workshop Series, the impact it created and the satisfaction of the attendants all bear witness to their success. The Workshop Series lasted for a whole month, were attended by more than 300 participants, and 6 international experts were invited to contribute. A Toolkit for Teachers and a Toolkit for Parents of individuals with Learning Disabilities in Arabic in Kuwait were also produced following the Workshop Series.

The success of the ELC Programme prompted the Kuwait Ministry of Education to request from the Public Authority for Applied Education & Training (PAAET) to provide qualified teachers (650 teachers over the next 10 years), who specialize in learning disabilities to enable the MoE to enhance its offered services for individuals with learning disabilities in both private and mainstream government schools across Kuwait. The UNDP Experts working on the ELC Project provided much needed feedback and assistance to PAAET (Faculty of Basic Education) to introduce a dedicated programme on learning disabilities for student teachers at both kindergarten, primary and intermediary stage levels. The UNDP further helped establish the first dedicated Learning Disabilities Library in Kuwait and the Arab World as well as the first dedicated National Help Line for Learning Disabilities in Kuwait. Work is still underway to produce nationally standardized tests for the assessment of learning disabilities as well as develop the first Arabic multi-sensory structured remedial teaching programme in Arabic.

Because of the great work of UNDP, many Kuwaiti national beneficiaries are now able to share their work with their Gulf and Arab colleagues in an effort to cross fertilize the progress and benefits to the rest of the Gulf and Arab countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Elbeheri, G. (2005) Dyslexia in Arabia: The Kuwait story. Dyslexia Review, Volume 17 Number 1. Dyslexia Institute: Staines, UK.