

Resident Representative Opening Speech at the Dyslexia Screening and Assessment Conference 17-18 March 2008

It is with great pleasure that I attend the “Dyslexia Screening and Assessment Conference”. We are very pleased to be here today to show that UNDP is committed to take a leading role in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, and to help such persons to address their needs and potentialities, in a development framework.

On 13 December 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted the first new UN human rights convention of the 21st century – the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Learning disabilities are major obstacles to literacy and numeracy, and learning disabled individuals need empowerment to be able to overcome the many challenges associated with their learning disabilities. To help reduce literacy problems in Kuwait, knowledge of effective educational interventions for at-risk students must be part of the current school practice as well as teacher preparation programs. 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.

The cooperation between UNDP and the Dyslexia Association started 5 years ago through the Early Learning Challenges Project, under the 2nd Country Cooperation Framework between the Government of Kuwait and UNDP.

The project has witnessed some impressive successes in the efforts to encourage the process of transferring knowledge and building capacity in the field of learning disability:

1. A survey study of dyslexia in Kuwait which is the only survey study conducted across the Arab World which highlighted the alarming prevalence rate of dyslexia in Kuwait at 6.3% of the number of students attending primary schools. Many other organizations in the Arab World have shown great interest in replicating such a survey study across their respective countries.
2. UNDP consultants Arabized “The Cognitive Profiling System (CoPs)” computer software for the early identification of at risk Kuwaiti Arabic speaking children from the ages of 4 years till 9 years. The software is the only one of its kind in the Arab World, thus providing, for the first time, a localized valid and reliable computerized tool in Arabic to be used by kindergarten and early schools years in Kuwait.
3. Awareness campaign that lead to a Ministerial Decree establishing a Dyslexia Higher Committee to supervise Dyslexia related activities in Kuwait mainstream schools.

4. General Training Courses on dyslexia and learning disabilities were delivered as part of the ELC project in addition to Specific Training Courses and Workshops.

The above list of achievements is outstanding!

Kuwait is well prepared to take a leading role to broaden the scope of Cross-fertilization and wider regional/Arab impact. Kuwait is currently leading the Arab World in issues of Awareness and Advocacy and to some extent Assessment Tools. It is anticipated that over the next 5 years, the ELC Project under the new Country Programme can provide much needed continuity particularly in the field of Assessment, Intervention and Training with excellent team of UNDP consultants, whom some of them will be presenting today.

We are very proud of our association with the Dyslexia association, and the success they have achieved. So to our colleagues here, especially Mr Mohammad Al Qatami, we wish you great success; your passion for your work and your compassion for those suffering from Learning disabilities is inspiring. We also would like to thank KIPCO for sponsoring such an important conference in its efforts to raise awareness on dyslexia.