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**PROVISION OF EDUCATION BY NON-STATE ACTORS
IN ARAB COUNTRIES: BENEFITS AND RISKS**



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Preface

Basic social services such as education, water and sanitation, health care and housing are intended to meet essential human needs. States are responsible for guaranteeing equal access to these services, either through direct provision or through the regulation of services provided by the private sector and civil society organizations. Following independence, most Arab countries built comprehensive systems of social services, provided to the population by the State free of charge. With population growth, however, and in the wake of socioeconomic crises and armed conflict, these public systems have been pushed beyond their capacity. In response, private sector and civil society organizations have begun to fill the gaps in coverage and to address quality deficits that have increasingly characterized State service provision in several countries.

In order to explore the extent of this change, and to support countries in assessing their current welfare mix, the Social Development Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has researched the distribution of responsibilities between State, market and civil society in the provision of social services and social protection in its recent fifth Integrated Social Policy Report, titled *Towards a New Welfare Mix? Rethinking the Role of the State, the Market and Civil Society in the Provision of Social Protection and Social Services*". In addition, ESCWA has produced a series of technical papers that scrutinize the patterns of service provision by non-State actors. Questions that need to be explored include the following: Is the involvement of non-State actors increasing access to essential services in the Arab region, in particular for vulnerable groups? How does the State regulate standards and ensure the quality of services provided by market-based or non-profit organizations? How can synergies among different institutions be optimized?

The paper is largely built on two background papers authored by Ms. Katherine Brooks and Ms. Allison Minor, respectively. It was produced under the supervision of Ms. Gisela Nauk, Chief, Inclusive Social Development, Social Development Division, ESCWA and the overall guidance of Mr. Frederico Neto, Director, Social Development Division, ESCWA. The paper was substantially revised and updated by Mr. Anton Bjork. It also benefitted from comments and support by Ms. Alexandra Heinsjo-Jackson, Ms. Emilie de Keyzer, Ms. Eva Maria Bille, Mr. James Pinho, Ms. Salwa Mohammed, Ms. Tanja Sejersen, and Ms. Vanessa Steinmayer. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of ESCWA.

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Definitions

Although delineations are not always clear, the present research applies the following definitions: “Private sector provision” is defined as the provision of education services on a commercial basis. “Public-private partnership” (PPP) is treated as a special form of private sector provision wherein the State, through a formal agreement, outsources delivery of the service to private actors.

“Civil society provision” refers to the provision of services by social groups that seek to advance common interests operating on a non-profit basis. These may take the forms of charities, private foundations, religious groups, women’s groups, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Most countries in the Arab region and most literature on the subject classify all non-State schools as private schools regardless of whether they are for profit or not. This makes distinguishing patterns of private (for profit) and civil society provision (non-profit) of education difficult. For this reason, this paper will first look at all forms of non-State schooling from a more general viewpoint before moving on to a more detailed examination of the specific forms of participation that are typical for the private sector and civil society organizations (CSOs) separately.

This paper covers the Arab region, which comprises the following 22 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Existing literature on education in the Arab region frequently utilizes different understandings of its geographic limits, with some referring to it as “the ESCWA region” (excluding Arab States non-members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)), “the Middle East” (including Iran and often excluding some North African Arab States) or “the Middle East and North Africa” (MENA). Moreover, data are not available for many countries within the region and, as a result, the graphs in this paper often represent the selection of countries within the region for which data were available.

Introduction

Education is enshrined as a human right in article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to education and that education should be free and compulsory in the elementary and fundamental stages. According to the Declaration, higher education is also to be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. The right to education is, in addition, enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the 1990 Education for All initiative led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The global commitment to universal education has been further affirmed in the Millennium Development Goals, namely Goal 2, and subsequently in Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Once they reached independence, the vast majority of States within the Arab region made provision of education a top priority. This commitment remains strong today and many stakeholders continue to put education reform high on their development agendas. Their efforts have translated into significant improvements in enrolment rates. Considerable gains have been made in the region over recent years towards achieving universal primary school enrolment, which between 1999 and 2011 increased from 85 to 92 per cent.¹ There have also been substantive improvements in enrolment rates for higher levels of education. According to the World Bank, the 1970 mean enrolment rates for Middle East and North Africa countries were 26.5 per cent for the secondary level and 4.7 per cent for the tertiary level. These figures increased to 54.1 per cent for the secondary level and 12.0 per cent for the tertiary level by 1985, and to 75.3 per cent for the secondary level and 25.8 per cent for the tertiary level by 2003.² In recent years, particular progress has been made in the Arab region towards closing gender gaps in educational attainment, and female illiteracy has decreased rapidly and steadily over time. The literacy gap between men and women, which in 1990 stood at 0.62 literate females to one literate male, narrowed to 0.81 literate females to one literate male by 2011.³

Despite such substantial progress, many Arab States have faced challenges in providing their populations with access to qualitative, comprehensive and affordable education systems at all levels. These challenges include limited State budgets, growing populations and increasing demands for education. Political upheavals in recent years have also, in some countries, led to the stalling of educational reforms or interruptions in the provision of education. Students within the Arab region continue to fare below average in such international tests as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In 2011, participating Arab countries scored an unweighted average of 406.4 in the TIMSS mathematics tests of eighth graders, significantly below the TIMSS scale centre point of 500.⁴ The seven Arab countries that participated in the TIMSS tests both in 2003 and 2011 showed only a small aggregate improvement, scoring an unweighted average of 396.7 in the former year as compared to 408.3 in the latter.⁵ The World Bank, drawing on average test scores of TIMSS and PISA between the years 1995 and 2003, highlights considerable interregional differences, with Arab countries lagging somewhat behind Latin American countries and far behind countries in South and East Asia.⁶

¹ League of Arab States and United Nations, 2013, p. 17.

² World Bank, 2008, p. 15.

³ UNESCO-UIS, 2013, p. 27. The statistics do not include data for the Comoros, Djibouti and Somalia.

⁴ Mullis and others, 2011, pp. 42-43. Average calculated on data from the United Arab Emirates (456), Lebanon (449), Tunisia (425), Qatar (410), Bahrain (409), Jordan (406), Palestine (404), Saudi Arabia (394), Syrian Arab Republic (380), Morocco (371) and Oman (366). The statistics should be taken only as rough indicators, as most of them come with “reservations about reliability of average achievement because the percentage of students with achievement too low for estimation does not exceed 25% but exceeds 15%”.

⁵ The seven countries in question and their 2003 scores were Lebanon (433), Jordan (424), Tunisia (410), Bahrain (401), Palestine (390), Morocco (387), and Saudi Arabia (332). See Mullis and others, 2004, p. 34.

⁶ World Bank, 2008, p. 19.

For many decades, Arab Governments have invested significantly more in education than Governments in Latin America and Asia.⁷ Despite this, however, employment prospects for many graduates remain poor. In 2010, the average unemployment rate for the Arab region was estimated at 9.7 per cent. The youth unemployment rate was notably higher, at 24.6 per cent.⁸ Furthermore, youth unemployment in the Arab region is significantly higher among high-school and university graduates than among others.⁹ Together, these trends indicate that investments in education have not necessarily bought good quality instruction everywhere. The factors lying behind this phenomenon are discussed later in the paper.

As a reaction to these problems, the quality and efficiency of education within the region has become a growing priority over recent years. For example, Jordan recently undertook a project in collaboration with the World Bank to tackle persistent underperformance in schools. This project involved school renovation, curriculum revision and a comprehensive review of teacher training.¹⁰ Qatar, in its efforts to implement reforms, has attempted to encourage flexibility in the education sector by decentralizing authority to independent schools.¹¹ However, there has been no uniform pattern in the education reform and development across the region as a whole, suggesting that further efforts are needed to share good practices and to harmonize education policies across the region.

Many countries in the Arab region are facing the dual challenge of improving the quality and relevance of their education systems while also expanding those systems. Simultaneously increasing coverage, on the one hand, and quality and relevance, on the other, is stretching the capacities of many countries beyond their limits, particularly given that Arab Governments already spend significantly more on education than Governments of other developing countries. In the face of these challenges, many Arab countries have witnessed increased non-State provision of education at various levels of schooling.¹² This increased reliance on non-State actors is occurring as a result of State policy as well as private demand. Not only are families increasingly turning to schools that are run privately or by the civil society instead of public education systems, but many States are also actively encouraging the involvement of non-State actors or pursuing cooperation with the private sector in the provision of education. This paper examines current trends in non-State provision of education in the Arab region. It focuses on a selected number of countries at different levels of socioeconomic development in order to present a broad overview of regional trends.

There are a number of important studies addressing the current state of educational provision within the Arab region, perhaps most notably the report *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform within the Middle East and Africa*, published by the World Bank in 2008, together with reports by national Governments. Moreover, reports have recently been written about the role of non-State actors in the provision of education in other regions, such as the report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on *Non-State Providers and Public-Private Partnerships in Education for the Poor*, covering in the East Asia and Pacific region.¹³ The 2014 ESCWA report, *Integrated Social Policy V: Towards a New Welfare Mix?*, looked into the public sector, the private sector and civil society as providers of welfare in the Arab region. Building on these and other previous studies, this paper seeks to further illuminate the nature of social policy in Arab States in matters of education by looking specifically into non-public education providers.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁸ ILO, 2012, p. 140. The statistics do not include data for the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania and Somalia.

⁹ Gatti and others, 2013, p. 78.

¹⁰ World Bank, 2009, pp. 9-10.

¹¹ Guarino and others, 2009, p. 1.

¹² See, for example, ESCWA, 2014, pp. 33-36.

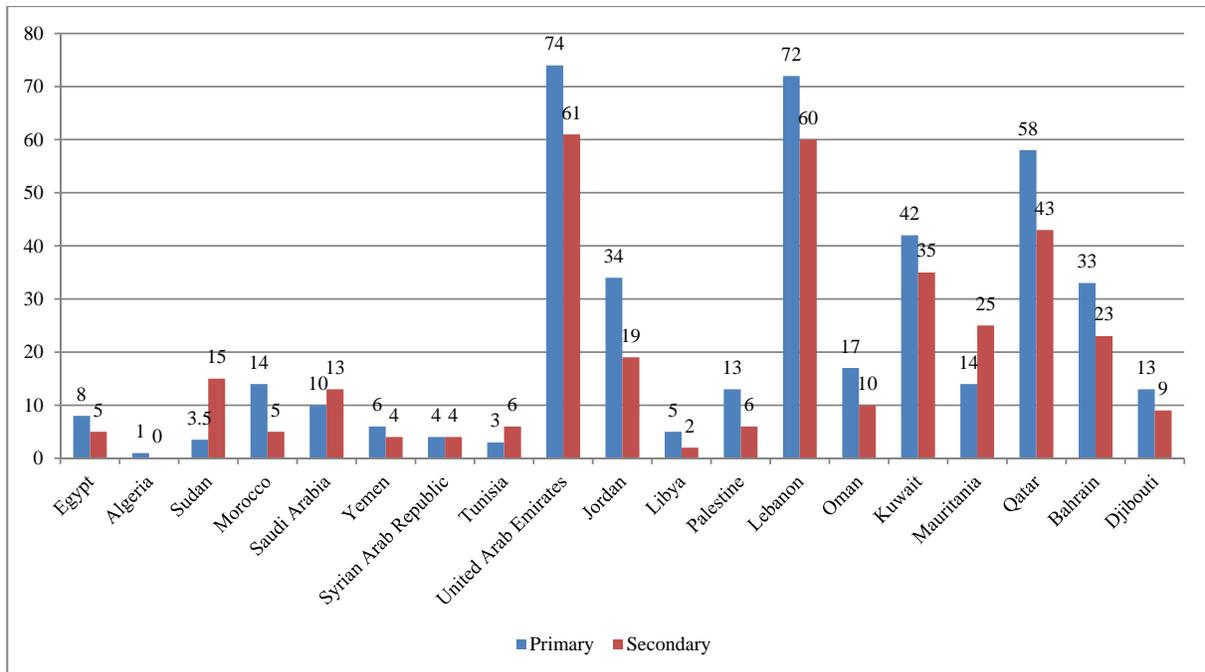
¹³ UNICEF, 2011.

This paper will first outline the patterns of non-State provision of education across the region, including the trends observed in non-State provision, the forms of private sector and civil society provision of education in the Arab region and the regulation of non-State schools in varying national contexts. Furthermore, the paper analyses the benefits and risks of both private sector and civil society provision of education. The benefits and risks of non-State provision are measured by three criteria: the extent to which it increases availability of education, quality and relevance of the education provided and its impact upon equity in the education system. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations on how the benefits of private and civil society provision of education can be realized and the associated risks minimized.

I. PATTERNS OF NON-STATE PROVISION OF EDUCATION

As shown in figure I, the prevalence of non-State provision of education varies within the Arab region. In Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates, for example, rates of non-State provision reach more than 50 per cent, while in Algeria, non-State provision is almost non-existent. This significant variation among Arab countries is a result of a combination of factors, including government strategies for private sector and civil society participation; the country’s legal and regulatory framework; and the nature of the national education market.

Figure I. Private enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment in primary and secondary education



Source: World Bank, 2015.

Note: All statistics are for 2012 or later, except for Libya (primary and secondary, 2006), Saudi Arabia (secondary, 2008), Algeria (secondary, 2011) and Egypt (primary, 2007). The World Bank defines as private “all educational institutions not operated by a public authority, regardless of whether they receive financial support from public authorities”.

Across the region, private schools and those run by civil society organizations (CSOs) tend to diverge significantly in cost and quality. Moreover, the type of non-State actors involved in provision of education varies widely, with some countries experiencing greater levels of for-profit private provision and others demonstrating greater involvement of civil society actors. However, as in most regions of the world, a

significant portion of for-profit private schools is financially and socially exclusive, catering only to the political and economic elite.

The Arab region differs from other regions in that it does not conform to the usual pattern of non-State provision being more prevalent in higher levels of education than in lower ones.¹⁴ By contrast, in most Arab countries, as figure I shows, enrolment in non-State schools is higher for the primary level than for the secondary level. In Lebanon, as of 2003, it has even been higher for primary schools than for tertiary institutions.¹⁵ The potential negative consequences of greater non-State provision, especially for-profit private sector provision, in lower levels of education will be discussed later in this paper.

A. FORMS OF PRIVATE SECTOR PROVISION OF EDUCATION

Some countries in the Arab region have decades of experience with an active private education sector, while for others it is a novel phenomenon. For example, Kuwait's private school market developed as early as in the 1960s to serve a growing Arab expatriate population (box 1); whereas in Tunisia private provision was negligible and no specific legal framework for private education existed until quite recently. The State long sought to maintain a dominant role in the education field, mirroring other sectors in which the Tunisian Government had attempted to produce a well-managed, high-quality public system and limit private provision.

Box 1. Private schools and non-nationals in Kuwait

Like other member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Kuwait has a large expatriate community living in the country on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. In 2013, non-Kuwaitis were estimated to make up 66 per cent of the population.^{a/} With few exceptions, non-Kuwaiti children are excluded from public schools.^{b/} Therefore, a sizeable private sector has emerged to cater to the expatriate community. The big private sector, which mainly serves expatriates, is divided between schools for Arabs and schools for non-Arabs. While the Kuwaiti Government has developed a formal system for coordination with the former, coordination with schools serving non-Arabs occurs primarily on an informal basis, and these schools are, in general more, affiliated to the educational structures of the home country of the pupils, or their parents.^{c/} In addition, questions have been raised about the exclusion of many non-citizen potential students, including from the Bedouin community, from the Kuwaiti educational system.^{d/}

^{a/} Kuwait, Central Statistical Bureau, 2015.

^{b/} Shah, 2013, pp. 5-6; and Al-Nakib, 2015, p. 6.

^{c/} Shah, 2013, pp. 5-7.

^{d/} See, for example, Buqrais, 2014.

However, even among countries with little history of private schools, the region is witnessing a move towards increased private sector participation, particularly in the fields of technical and vocational education and training, and shared financing. In Morocco, for instance, the proportion of students enrolled in private post-secondary education almost quadrupled, increasing from 5 to 19 per cent, between 2003 and 2008.¹⁶ In some cases, this increase is the result of active government strategies; in others, it is primarily a market response to the growth of a popular demand for alternative education provision due to perceived weaknesses in the public system. In the context of drastic youth unemployment, students are naturally eager to maximize their post-graduation job prospects. A survey of young people in the region found that more than one third were "willing to pay for their education, if this were to lead to better job prospects".¹⁷

¹⁴ World Bank, 2008, p. 27.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ International Finance Corporation and Islamic Development Bank, 2011, p. 27.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

Governments often rely on private schools to lighten some of their burden by decreasing the need for public provision. Reliance on the private sector to cover the large non-national population in Kuwait represents one way of how that burden can be lightened. The Tunisian authorities have actively sought to promote private primary education in places where public provision is scarce.¹⁸ While private education is sometimes of an elitist nature, it can also function as a safety net for low performers who are able to afford it. In Egypt, for instance, public schools require students to attain a certain score on exit exams to qualify for progression to the next education level. For students who fail to qualify, vocational or private academic schools are usually the only avenues for continued education – although this path is, of course, generally closed to the non-privileged majority.¹⁹ In the Sudan, private education has largely, though not exclusively, been an alternative for those not making it into government schools. In recent years, however, with increasing overcrowding and exhaustion of resources in public schools, partly as a result of increased primary enrolment, more Sudanese families have begun turning to private schools as a preferred option, thereby altering the public opinion of such institutions.²⁰

1. *Public-private partnerships and coordinated provision*

The below table shows the various arrangements through which education can be funded and provided. Form I, in the upper-left corner, is the model of schools and universities that are both funded and managed privately. Home schooling and private tutoring also fall under this bracket. Form IV refers to traditional State schools and universities, which are both publically funded and operated. Form II includes options for private financing of publicly provided education, which occurs primarily when private companies fund student loans, or when States charge user fees to students for State-provided education, but it can also include private philanthropic ventures. Form III depicts the various options for private provision of education with partial or full State financing, including contract schools and charter schools managed by private providers; State systems for providing vouchers which can be redeemed for education at private facilities; and subsidies for tuition fees on the basis of scholarships or more comprehensive access programmes.

Forms II and III detail the predominant forms of public-private partnerships (PPPs) that can be entered into by State and non-State partners. A variety of other forms of collaboration between the public and private sectors are also found in the Arab region, including private companies consulting on curriculum development, or dual training programmes linking training centres with private companies and future employers. If coordination is not managed by a formal contract, as PPPs are, it is considered informal coordination.

FORMS OF DISTRIBUTION OF PROVISION AND FINANCING OF EDUCATION

		Provision	
		Private	Public
Finance	Private	I. Traditional fee-paying private schools (Private universities, home schooling, tutoring)	II. Private philanthropic ventures Tuition fees and other user fees in public schools Adopt-a-school programmes
	Public	III. Contract schools Charter schools Voucher programmes Private school subsidy programmes	IV. Traditional public (State) schools and public universities

PPPs in the region are concluded primarily in the provision of professional and training programmes. A variety of donors fund unique PPPs for technical and vocational education and training initiatives in the

¹⁸ Tunisia, Ministry of Education and Training, n.d., p. 26.

¹⁹ Loveluck, 2012, pp. 9-10.

²⁰ Alredaisy, 2011, pp. 64 and 72.

interest of improving the efficiency and relevance of training programmes, especially in Egypt and Tunisia. One example is the Education for Employment programme, which operates in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen. Cooperating with an array of international businesses as well as educational establishments, it has gained wide recognition for its efforts to create and introduce training that is relevant to the job market and subsequent employment, through local-level PPPs.²¹ A similar programme, the Mubarak-Kohl Initiative Dual System, based on German-Egyptian cooperation, was ongoing in Egypt between 1994 and 2007. It offered a three-year dual training programme for students with a combination of traditional technical courses and practical training to ensure that students gained the skills most needed in the job market.²² A survey carried out in 2002 found a substantive proportion of graduates from the Mubarak-Kohl Initiative Dual System either being employed (30 per cent) or pursuing higher education (40 per cent).²³ The role of international donors in these and similar initiatives is noteworthy, demonstrating a growing international consensus in favour of this type of strategy.

2. Uncoordinated private-sector provision

In addition to PPPs and informal coordination, there are examples of uncoordinated private provision of education in the Arab region, notably in the form of private tutoring. Traditionally, private tutoring has been considered a method of meeting special student needs. However, in Morocco and Egypt for example, the role of private tutoring has expanded significantly beyond this traditional role. It has become a more widespread phenomenon considered essential by many families for supplementing regular classes that, in some way, do not provide sufficient instruction. The importance of exit exams that determine whether, or in what schools, students will proceed in their studies is one factor creating this demand, especially when those exams emphasize memorization and specific knowledge rather than responsiveness and critical thinking. This trend is particularly pronounced in Egypt (box 2).

Box 2. Private tutoring in Egypt

While private school enrolment is relatively limited among the Egyptian population, private tutoring is pervasive, creating a parallel or “shadow” education system. Private tutoring emerged largely as a response to the importance of the memorization-based national exams and the low quality of public sector education. Estimates have suggested that 80 per cent of students receive private tutoring in the final year of preparatory and secondary school leading up to exit exams.^{a/} This is reflected in household expenditures on education in Egypt, almost two fifths of which went to private tutoring in 2012/13.^{b/} Even families unable to afford tutoring feel the need to pursue it, apparently pushing up household expenditures on education to 20-50 per cent of household income.^{c/} In absolute terms, however, the wealthiest quintile spends almost 10 times more on private tutoring than the poorest.^{d/} Beyond being a form of preparation for exams, private tutoring has become a normal part in the lives of students, to the extent that some students prioritize tutoring over regular schooling.^{e/} A more affordable option to individual private tutoring is group tutoring. This form of tutoring usually takes place at the school or another communal space and is led by teachers of the same school. With relatively low fees, group tutoring is more accessible to all portions of the population.^{f/}

^{a/} Hartmann, 2008, p. 56. For more recent anecdotal evidence indicating the persistence of private tutoring in Egypt, see Daraghi, 2013.

^{b/} Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2014.

^{c/} Hartmann, 2008, p. 60.

^{d/} World Bank, 2012a, p. 65. Spending on private tutoring is also shown to be well over twice as high within the richest quintile as within the second richest. The difference is far smaller between the three lowest quintiles.

^{e/} Hartmann, 2008, p. 57.

^{f/} Ibid., p. 72.

²¹ Education for Employment, 2012.

²² Adams, 2010, pp. 3 and 17.

²³ Ibid., pp. 20-21. The same source also highlights critique directed against the programme for, among other things, its “limitations on a national scale in reaching geographic regions and sectors that were not industrialized”.

B. FORMS OF CIVIL SOCIETY PROVISION OF EDUCATION

The types of CSOs involved in providing education vary widely, both between and within Arab countries. Emblematic for the entire region though is the large number of schools run by, or at least affiliated to, religious organizations, institutions or endowments. In some countries, highly developed networks of religious educational establishments predate the modern State. One example of this is the system of Islamic primary schools in Morocco, which dates back to the Umayyad era (661-750 A.D.). In 2003, Koranic schools – *kuttabs* and the more traditional *m'sids* – stood for 90 per cent of Morocco's pre-school institutions, which were attended by one third of the country's children aged between 3 and 7. Lately, many of these religious schools have, with the involvement of the Government, widened their curricula to encompass modern teachings complementing the traditional ones.²⁴

Egypt and Yemen have similar systems, although only a comparatively low 8 per cent of Egyptian pre-school enrolled children in 2009/10 attended religious Al-Azhar kindergartens, whereas government kindergartens accounted for 73 per cent. In 2005/06, primary schools operated by Al-Azhar and by the Government enrolled 10 and 83 per cent of all pupils, respectively.²⁵ Religious involvement increases at the higher levels of education in Egypt. In 2010, almost one fifth of the country's undergraduates were enrolled in the Al-Azhar system.²⁶ In Lebanon, similarly, such religious organizations as mosques, churches or political-religious movements provide many schools. This involvement of religious organizations in educational provision necessarily impacts both the demographic traits of their student bodies, who tend to come from the sect or religious community in which the school is embedded, and the curricula of their schools.²⁷

In addition, there are non-faith-based CSOs operating as education providers in the Arab region. In Lebanon, for example, the Amal Association, which targets refugees and other vulnerable groups, plays such a role. In Jordan and Morocco, similarly, a number of NGOs provide education to persons with disabilities, whose access to the conventional education system is limited.²⁸ Furthermore, almost half a million children in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic are enrolled in schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which is not a CSO.²⁹

C. REGULATION OF NON-STATE SCHOOLS

It is typical for Governments in the region to adopt similar regulatory standards and procedures covering for-profit and not-for-profit schools, a fact reflected in the way both types of schools tend to be treated collectively as private schools. All non-State schools in the region are typically subject to a series of regulations covering, to varying degrees, curricula, infrastructure, teacher qualifications, graduation certification, reporting and accreditation. A ministry or similar authority tends to cover tertiary institutions, while pre-schools are often monitored by bodies dealing with families and/or children.

As with any form of private or civil society provision of social services, a regulatory regime is highly important. Ideally, regulation should assure a degree of consistency in education standards across public, private and civil society schools. At the same time, however, if regulations are too strict, they may reduce autonomy in managerial and curricula decision-making. Such autonomy can be important in order to allow

²⁴ Bouzoubaa and Benghabrit-Remaoun, 2004, pp. 472-474.

²⁵ UNESCO-IBE, 2012.

²⁶ Egypt, Institute of National Planning, 2010, p. 46.

²⁷ See, for example, Harrison, 2007, p. 120.

²⁸ ESCWA, 2014, pp. 65-66.

²⁹ UNRWA, 2015.

innovation, variety and flexibility in the education sector. It has been argued, for example, that the regulatory regime to which private institutions of higher education in Egypt are subjected compromises their ability to operate in an innovative fashion.³⁰ Of course, the type of regulation is at least as critical as its degree. According to the 2008 World Bank study, school monitoring systems in Arab States have often been used as tools to ensure compliance with ministry rules rather than actual educational quality.³¹

The history of non-State schooling regulations varies considerably across Arab countries. For example, Kuwait has a long-standing and fairly extensive regulatory framework.³² In Tunisia, however, non-State schools were managed on an informal basis until 2000, and were classified as a form of vocational training. This changed with Law No. 73 of 2000 covering private tertiary institutions and Law No. 23 of 2002 dealing with private primary and secondary institutions. These laws considerably increased the supervision of non-State educational institutions by the Ministry of Education and forbade tertiary institutions from having a political, ethnic or religious nature.³³

Regulations on curricula vary across countries. Some Governments pay particular attention to the role education content can play in shaping national identity and shared values. In Kuwait, for example, the Government states that one of the roles of education in the country is, “building the correct Islamic faith in the educated so that its principles become a method of thought and style, which develops the preparation of [those who are] educated with Arab-Islamic heritage and loyalty to the Arab-Islamic identity”.³⁴ It furthermore requires non-State schools, including those using a foreign curriculum, to teach Arabic and Islamic studies.³⁵ In Saudi Arabia, similarly, private international schools have recently been obligated to devote a minimum of one hour per week to the teaching of “Islamic civilization and Arabic language, as well as the history of the Kingdom and its geography”.³⁶

Certain countries have taken additional measures, including the regulation of school fees. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the Ministry of Education has set up committees to which schools must apply in order to raise their fees, and to which parents can turn to complain about unreasonably high tuition costs.³⁷

II. BENEFITS AND RISKS OF NON-STATE ACTORS’ INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION PROVISION

A. BENEFITS OF PRIVATE SECTOR PROVISION

One of the main benefits of private sector provision in Arab countries is that it relieves financial pressure upon stretched education budgets. As figure II shows, several Arab States devote as much or more resources, measured as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP), to public provision of education as do countries in other regions. Some other Arab countries, however, devote considerably less. Often though, these investments do not translate efficiently into improved educational outcomes. Private sector provision can fill existing gaps in the provision of education by the State, particularly for non-national populations. In some cases, the State has an interest in supporting private providers that are filling an existing gap.

³⁰ World Bank and OECD, 2010, p. 27.

³¹ World Bank, 2008, p. 198.

³² UNESCO-IBE, 2011.

³³ Kwiek, n.d.

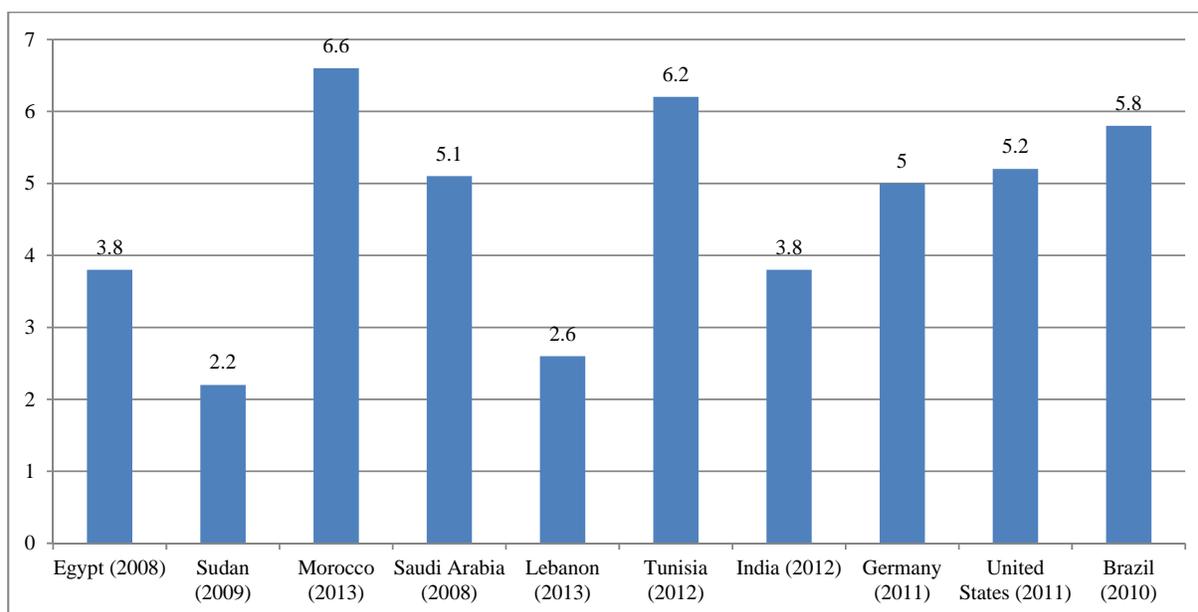
³⁴ Kuwait, Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 47.

³⁵ UNESCO-IBE, 2007.

³⁶ Khan, 2013.

³⁷ Fakkar, 2015.

Figure II. Government spending on education as a percentage of GDP



Source: World Bank, 2015.

With regard to the quality of education provided by non-State schools, given the diverse range of private schools both within national contexts and across the region, it is difficult to generalize the nature of the education offered by such institutions. This difficulty is compounded by the definitional issues previously mentioned wherein civil society institutions are often subsumed under the category of private schools within the existing literature on education. When evaluating the benefits and risks of private for-profit education, therefore, many statistics must be treated with caution.

Private schools often have advantages over public schools that translate into improved educational outcomes. In Egypt, for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has found that “while the majority of so-called ‘achievers’ (achieving 90 per cent in the secondary stage completion exam) come from government schools, the likelihood of being an achiever increases exponentially if a student is in a private school or in a governmental experimental school”.³⁸ However, these trends could be due to other variables and further disaggregated data would be needed in order to research them in more depth. Moreover, this is not the case in all national contexts or for all private schools, since the role that private schools play in the education system as a whole, the market they serve and the regulations to which they are subjected all affect the quality of instruction and the standard of educational outcomes.

Some of the most important factors often contributing to increased educational outcomes for private providers are the greater availability of resources and the consequently smaller class sizes. In addition, the greater autonomy of private schools is often advantageous.³⁹ In Egypt, a high degree of centralization has often made it difficult to introduce new initiatives and reforms in individual public schools and districts.⁴⁰ Private schools, however, do not, to the same extent, have to contend with a difficult bureaucratic and regulatory framework and therefore have more freedom to experiment with new methods and policies.⁴¹

³⁸ Egypt, Institute of National Planning, 2010, p. 4.

³⁹ World Bank, 2008, pp. 192-196.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 290; and Loveluck, 2012, pp. 7-9.

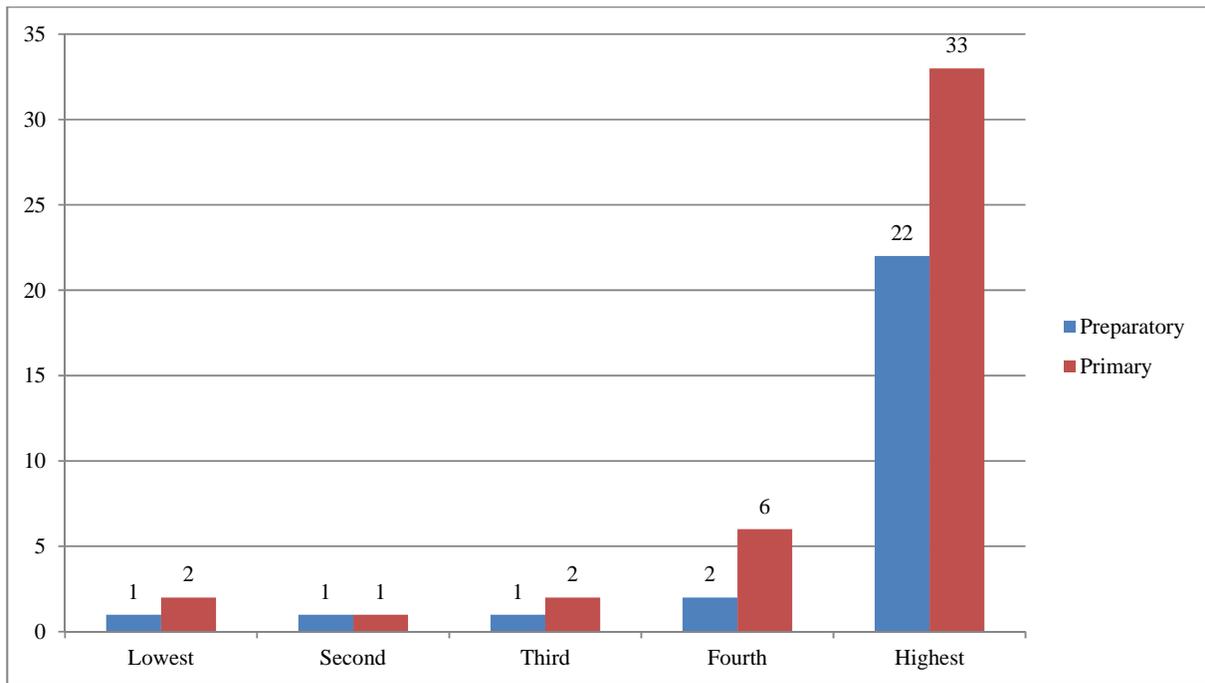
⁴¹ World Bank, 2008, p. 193.

One of the most important potential benefits of private sector participation is its ability to improve the relevance of the education system to the employment market. The private sector is seen to enjoy a variety of advantages over the public sector in this objective, particularly because private providers generally tend to have stronger ties to the private sector. Furthermore, the fact that private schools often are more resourceful and autonomous than public schools can allow them to be more flexible and responsive to changes in the labour market and to innovate so that students are in tune with new technology and other developments. A report by the International Finance Corporation and the Islamic Development Bank Group emphasizes the potential of vocational and education training provision by the nascent private sector to help young people obtain the skills requested by employers, highlighting regional success stories.⁴²

B. RISKS OF PRIVATE SECTOR PROVISION

As in any case where services can be purchased privately, there is a risk that the availability of private facilities privileges the wealthier members of society and reinforces existing inequalities. In most Arab countries, public funding or subsidies for private education are limited while the profit-driven nature of private schools entails that fees are often high. The resultant inequitable access to private education is demonstrated by figure III, which shows that private school enrolment in Egypt is negligible except among the highest income bracket. These schools, which often provide students with greater resources and smaller class sizes, are thus usually inaccessible to the majority of the population regardless of merit or ability. However, there are risks in over-generalizing the superior services provided by private schools. In many cases, higher costs do not translate into better-quality education.⁴³

Figure III. Private enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment by wealth quintile, Egypt



Source: World Bank, 2012a, pp. 54-55.

⁴² International Finance Corporation and Islamic Development Bank, 2011, pp. 56-57.

⁴³ ESCWA, 2014, p. 48.

Access to private schooling may be more evenly distributed across income groups in countries with higher rates of private schooling, including Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates. Still, in all national contexts where the State does not offer needs-based or merit-based support, for example in the form of stipends or scholarships, substantial inequities in access to education tend to be manifest. In cases where the public sector offers full education coverage of a high quality, such equity issues are less problematic. However, in countries where the public sector often fails to meet the needs of the population, by not fully preparing students for entrance exams or by failing to make students competitive in the job market, equity is a significant worry. Compounding this problem is the concern that the existence of private sector alternatives can conceivably reduce the perceived necessity of improving the public sector. In countries like Kuwait, where the non-State education sector primarily serves the needs of a large expatriate community that is excluded from the public system, the issue of equity of access to education is somewhat different, relating more to the differential fiscal burdens placed on the households of expatriate families.

The distribution of private enrolment across education levels has a noticeable impact on the level of equity of the education system. As described earlier, in most Arab countries, the private sector plays a larger role in the primary level than in the secondary level. However, best practice recommendations suggest that the State should focus on ensuring the provision of primary education in order to ensure equity, quality and full coverage at the most foundational levels of the system.⁴⁴ A lack of full State coverage is particularly problematic for primary education, since all citizens should, at minimum, be given equitable access to primary education, as mandated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One could also argue that private sector participation is more appropriate for the post-primary sector since there is a greater need for specialization and variety at higher education levels, and the private sector often has greater flexibility and resources that allow it to meet these diverse needs.

Lack of access to good quality primary education often impedes the ability of students to qualify for secondary or tertiary education. The existence of merit-based barriers to enrolment in many secondary education facilities means that those denied access to quality education at a primary level are more likely to be denied it at the secondary level. Furthermore, inequity experienced early on in the education system is usually very difficult to compensate for at higher levels. The signs of this are particularly clear with regard to enrolment at the tertiary level in Egypt. Despite the existence of scholarship programmes, only 4.3 per cent of university students are from the lowest wealth quintile, compared to 74 per cent coming from the top two wealth quintiles. Of those who graduate from higher education, 52 per cent come from the highest wealth quintile, and the vast majority are urban.⁴⁵ This suggests that equity deficits in primary education contribute towards limiting the opportunities of poorer and rural students later on in the education system, and thus in the job market as well.

In the field of technical and vocational education and training, the private sector can often offer unique advantages to improve the quality of training and relevance to the job market. However, in cases where access to such training is dependent upon ability to pay, overreliance upon private institutions by Governments can perpetuate inequitable access to employment opportunities. In addition, the high investment cost in private education establishments means that their number often fails to meet popular demand. For example, the fact that the Sudan has no private technical secondary schools may be a consequence of the country's economic underperformance.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ World Bank, 2008, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Egypt, Institute of National Planning, 2010, p. 46.

⁴⁶ World Bank, 2012b, p. 45.

Risks of private tutoring

The potential consequences associated with the phenomenon of private tutoring are most evident in Egypt. Private tutoring fulfils the needs of both students who risk failing critical national exams due to low-quality public schools, and teachers who need an additional source of income to supplement low public salaries. While the provision of private tutoring is distinctly different from the service supplied by private schools, it too is emerging, largely due to the public system's inadequacies, particularly relating to the quality of instruction and the character of national exams.⁴⁷ Yet, at the same time, private tutoring could potentially undermine the public system by reducing pressure for improvements, and it significantly drives up household education expenditures.⁴⁸

It has been noted that in Egypt, for example, students often prioritize their afternoon tutoring over regular classes, which contributes to absenteeism in the formal system. There are also worrying reports regarding conflicts of interest among teachers stemming from the overlap of their private tutoring and their regular classes. Some students complain that teachers tend to favour the students who go to them for private tutoring over those who do not, which potentially results in neglect and even, according to some reports, higher rates of corporal punishment for non-tutored students. Additionally, some students suggest that teachers purposefully do not cover the entire syllabus so that students are required to seek tutoring from them.⁴⁹ In addition to undermining the public system, this can have serious consequences with regard to equity. Households with lower income often cannot afford private tutoring, as made evident by the fact that only nearly half as many students in the lowest wealth quintile as in the highest one rely on it.⁵⁰ This means that it is students with low income who potentially suffer most from the alleged discrimination by teachers and incomplete instruction. In cases where private tutoring offers substantive advantages, therefore, students who cannot afford private tuition are considerably disadvantaged.

C. BENEFITS OF CIVIL SOCIETY PROVISION

One of the most significant benefits of civil society participation in education provision is increasing access to education. In many contexts, civil society provision of education in the Arab region enables children to access better and longer-term education at a lower cost than in for-profit private educational facilities. Such is the case in Lebanon, where CSOs have provided and/or funded education services in the wake of a substantial deficit in State capacity both during and after the civil war.⁵¹ Moreover, CSOs have been instrumental in allowing disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities, access to education.⁵²

There is an interesting pattern of better educational outcomes in countries with higher levels of CSO involvement. For example, in the TIMSS tests referred to in the introduction of this paper, countries exhibiting high levels of CSO provision, including Jordan and Lebanon, scored better than other countries with similar levels of GDP per capita.⁵³ However, correlation is not necessarily indicative of causation, and more research is required in order to ascertain the precise impact of civil society participation on educational outcomes. The popularity of civil society schools affiliated to religious or charitable groups within the region may indicate, at least in part, comparably higher standards of educational instruction. Much of this may be attributed to the factors mentioned above, which frequently ensure better educational outcomes in private

⁴⁷ World Bank, 2008, p. 190.

⁴⁸ Hartmann, 2008, p. 60.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁰ El Zanaty and Gorin, 2007, p. 114.

⁵¹ Baylouny, 2010, pp. 65-67.

⁵² ESCWA, 2014, pp. 68-70.

⁵³ World Bank, 2008, p. 20.

education generally. Such factors include allowing parents to exert greater control over their children's education and the existence of a substantial market of faith-based schools, meaning that civil society educational establishments have incentives both to increase educational attainment and to minimize costs. However, the popularity of schools managed by religious organizations has also in many cases, as in Jordan for instance, been influenced by their reputation for offering more faith-based education and providing what many parents feel to be a more relevant or morally appropriate environment for their children.⁵⁴

D. RISKS OF CIVIL SOCIETY PROVISION

As a result of the lack of existing data on the comparable quality of CSO provision of education and the failure of existing studies to differentiate between civil society and for-profit private provision in the Arab region, this section will primarily concentrate on the impact of CSO provision of education on access and equity. It is often assumed that civil society organizations are strongly motivated by existing equity deficits and more inclined to pursue equitable access policies. However, an examination of their role in the provision of education in the Arab region proves that this is frequently not the case. Rather, there are observable equity deficits within civil society provision of education which, in many cases, exacerbate existing problems of inequality.

Firstly, while CSO provision tends to improve overall access to education, the dependence of many civil society educational facilities upon student fees entails that the poorest parents in many countries still have few options other than sending their children to State-run schools or to less well-funded schools run by other organizations. The fees required by private and CSO schools also vary considerably, meaning that the wealthier a family is, the more options it has for educating its children. Secondly, as is the case with private provision, the phenomenon of civil society groups being comparatively more involved in the provision of primary education than secondary education also raises concerns. Thirdly, the faith-based origins of many CSO schools have been observed to exacerbate existing horizontal inequalities. For example, in Lebanon, the fact that the vast majority of civil society provision of education is associated with religious or sectarian groups entails that educational facilities are, to a large extent, provided both by and for individuals within that sectarian group. This can be problematic, as the relatively unequal distribution of resources among the different sects in Lebanon means that different groups have varying financial capacity to provide education. This disparity in educational horizons for children of different sects could potentially mean that existing inequalities between groups are perpetuated through unequal access to education.

The sectarian-based nature of civil society provision of education in certain countries has resulted in a number of other negative effects. As in many cases where religious or sectarian groups tend to frequent separate schools, it can serve to perpetuate social divisions between these groups. Not only do children of different faiths get little opportunity to integrate into society, but often children from different sects will be taught different versions of history, which is particularly problematic when that history involves the legacy of intercommunal violence. Recent attempts at educational reform in post-civil war Lebanon illustrate the difficulties of implementing a common curriculum for sensitive subjects such as history and religion in a society where sectarianism permeates the educational sector.⁵⁵ A study among students in that country has shown that those attending public schools tend to be "more open and tolerant than private school students toward those who are from a different religion".⁵⁶ That finding, of course, does not in itself prove that it is the public schools that have made their students more tolerant. Another study, however, focusing exclusively on confessional schools in Lebanon, has found that "a number of students attributed their lack of knowledge about others to the failure of their schools to promote mutual learning".⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Clark, 2004, p. 93.

⁵⁵ Abouchedid and others, 2002, pp. 61-62, 65-66 and 78.

⁵⁶ Frayha, 2003, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Abouchedid and others, 2002, p. 77.

Although Lebanon is probably the most extreme example of a country where education provided on a sectarian basis risks perpetuating division between groups and hence undermining national solidarity, it is by no means alone in suffering from these problems. The phenomenon is also noticeable in Egypt, where Muslim and Christian communities often provide education exclusively to their own, and in the Gulf States, where expatriate communities are forced to self-segregate their educational facilities.

III. CONCLUSION

This technical paper has presented the extent and diversity of non-State participation in the provision of education in the Arab region. It is evident that the nature and scope of both civil society and private sector provision vary widely both between and within national contexts. In all countries of the region, however, both private and civil society provision are undergoing substantial expansion in response to increasing challenges facing States in providing qualitative, equitable and universal education for their citizens.

The different cases and issues discussed above highlight the potential of non-State actors in providing additional investment in education, improving linkages to the job market and exercising greater autonomy and innovation in schooling. However, as in other sectors, increased non-State provision may create equity issues if efforts are not made to ensure that the benefits are spread equitably across the population and that they complement a strong public sector. Moreover, there are concerns that overreliance on the private sector for innovation may contribute to stagnation of the public system. It is important that Governments pursuing increased private sector provision recognize that it cannot be a substitute for decentralization and diversification of the public sector. An example of a successful combined strategy are the various initiatives regarding technical and vocational education and training throughout the region, which allow the public sector to take advantage of the expertise and advantages of the private sector.

Looking ahead, Governments should explore possibilities to expand non-State provision of education in ways that will help improve the relevance of academic programmes to the job market, and build PPPs and collaboration in vocational and training programmes. Given some of the key challenges facing the Arab region – unemployed graduates and a disconnection between education systems and the job market – as well as the comparative advantages of private sector actors, such reforms could be particularly beneficial. For many countries, improving the quality and relevance of education systems requires significant restructuring of current systems and curricula, and considerable additional resources. Such is the case in Kuwait, where the assurance of employment in the large public sector, which employs close to 90 per cent of Kuwaitis,⁵⁸ has lessened the need for the public education system to adapt itself to the requirements of the labour market. This has created a disconnection between the public education system and the skills needed in the labour market. Other countries in the Gulf face similar issues, to varying extents. As has been the case in many other regions, emphasizing professional and vocational training programmes and streamlining them into the regular education system could be a useful strategy. However, this may require changing popular attitudes, not just curricula and programmes, since technical and vocational education are frequently undervalued and seen as an inferior option for students.

There is a need for authorities to ensure, by regulation and other means, that the advantages of non-State provision accrue to all parts of society, including vulnerable groups. In order to prevent non-State provision of education from being a factor which aggravates or perpetuates social injustice, it may, in some contexts, be advisable to bring about regulation obliging private institutions to accept a certain number of students from less advantaged backgrounds free of charge, or to set fees according to a progressive scale taking into account the ability to pay of prospective students. Such measures could be complemented by scholarships and subsidies directed to non-privileged high-achievers. This is especially important in areas where the public system may be inadequate or where certain sectors of the population do not have access to public schools. Governments could also impose regulations, or reinforce existing ones, on the provision of

⁵⁸ Baldwin-Edwards, 2011, p. 15.

private tutoring by public school teachers – although, to be effective, restrictions of that sort might well have to be accompanied by such measures as higher salaries for teachers and stronger incentives for them to perform their ordinary jobs to the best of their ability. The issue of widespread private tutoring could also be mitigated by reforming or abolishing exit exams. Responding to this issue, Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia all abolished exit exams for primary education.⁵⁹

The impact of non-State provision would, in addition, be less inequitable if it were more concentrated on higher education, thereby freeing up larger shares of education budgets to be spent on education at lower levels. Existing discrepancies in terms of pre-primary and primary education imply that higher education, especially of the sort leading to good employment, is, in practice, extremely difficult to access for the poor, even if publicly provided and free of charge. Public resources presently spent on providing university education for the relatively affluent could, in other words, be redirected towards giving less fortunate children a good start in life, enabling them to compete on more equal terms later.

Governments should also be aware that, despite the many successes of CSO-run educational institutions, there is evidence to suggest that their existence may have limited impact in addressing growing inequities in education provision in the Arab region. Civil society actors have greatly assisted in improving access to education for many communities in a number of countries. However, a high level of involvement of civil society groups has sometimes served to deepen ethnic, sectarian and class divides, particularly in nations with diverse populations. In order to mitigate these harms, Governments would be well advised to encourage civil society groups to provide education across various social boundaries and adopt a more inclusive approach to education.

In summary, it is clear that substantial increases in non-State provision of education within Arab countries is a response to current challenges faced by Arab Governments attempting to provide universal, good quality and equitable education to their populations. The persistence of these challenges suggests that this trend of increased non-State provision is likely to continue. In many ways, both private and civil society provision of education is an effective way of meeting these challenges and enables improvements in availability, accessibility and quality of education. However, such participation entails its own negative externalities that need to be regulated and mitigated by the State – in particular the costs incurred to families and the significant equity concerns that have been explored in this paper. It is, therefore, essential that the State continues to play a key role in ensuring equitable access to education for all citizens while encouraging diversification of provision.

⁵⁹ World Bank, 2008, p. 189.

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