

WACC Directors Face to Face Meeting – London – September 2019

Middle East Region Presentation

Rania Rashad

Introduction:

For several years now the Middle East region has been passing through severe instabilities, accompanied by huge economic, social and political transformations; some of which are positive, however, others are quite negative. Some countries in the region, such as Egypt and Tunisia are now recovering from years of political turmoil and transformation after Arab Spring revolutions; and are now in a stage of State-Building. Others like Syria, Lebanon and Palestine are still suffering from civil and secular wars, with political intentions in the background; and with all expected social, economic and communication problems. “Communication” in the Middle East is no exception to the unstable status the whole region is going through. In some respects, it’s proven to be positive, while in others it’s proven to be negative.

The regional communication landscape:

The above being said, and being my country, I will talk in more detail about Egypt.

Thanks to the civil society and media efforts in adopting local and national advocacy campaigns with organized communication channels in the core, that mobilized various categories of the Egyptian Society; as well as the prevailing international trends, some issues / society categories have been brought forward on the priorities’ agenda of opinion leaders and decision makers; and have been witnessing leaps for a few years now.

Gender Balance and Equality:

After long years of marginalizing women and underestimating their crucial role in the socioeconomic welfare of their country; whether due to inherited customs and traditions; or fundamentalist culture, women’s rights now in Egypt are witnessing great positive transformation. Messages are communicated in several media channels, especially TV and radio, in simple languages that can be understood and absorbed by all society categories with all their cultural, social and educational variations. The content of the messages is targets highlighting the importance of women in the society, as the mother, the wife, the colleague.... As half of the society population. This is reflected in the following:

- Current women representation in the Egyptian Parliament reached 15% (compared to around 5% in the past) with aspirations to reach 25-30% in the future. Worth noting that current women parliamentarians have won their seats through elections rather than by being appointed.
- Nationwide Health campaigns and convoys in 2019, targeting women specifically for early detection and free treatment of general health issues and tumors. The moto being communicated for the campaign in all media channels is “Women’s Health is Egypt’s Health”.

- Media messages on the importance of girls' education as much as that of boys, where poor families tend to favor boys over girls in education due to poor economic conditions.
- The State announced 2017 to be the Year of Egyptian Women reflected in adequate women representation in public, private and civil institutions; facilitating the issuance of identity documents for women; economic development programs targeting women, etc.

People with Disabilities:

People with Disabilities in Egypt have been, and still are suffering a lot, especially those living in poor and marginalized areas, with low levels of income. In those areas, they are often considered a source of shame for their families; and are usually deprived of education, health and economic opportunities. However, due to numerous advocacy campaigns adopted by civil society, media and PWDs themselves, this status-quo is starting to change and improve. Media messages are communicated in various channel about their special abilities; and the significant contributions they can add to the society at all respects.

- 2018 announced to be the year for Egyptian PWDs.
- Special funds allocated by Ministry of Social Solidarity to improve the livelihoods of PWDs.
- Physical adaptation of public and private institutions and means of transportation to suit PWDs' needs.
- Special articles targeting PWDs' rights in the Egyptian Constitution.
- Establishment of the National Council for People with Disabilities to follow up and take care of all matters pertaining to people with disabilities.
- Prevailing moto in media about PWDs: "People with Special Abilities" instead of "People with Disabilities".

Youth:

Egyptian youth comprise more than half of the Egyptian population. And after years of instability, they were subject to numerous frustrations and challenges, such as unemployment. The State now views youth as its driving power for inclusive sustainable development. The following is taking place:

- Over the last five years, 8 youth communication conferences (national and international) have been arranged in Egypt under the auspices of the President, and with his attendance. Youth are encouraged to participate, communicate, and place their inquiries and views to the President directly, having free dialogues with him, among themselves and with decision makers on all pressing matters and trends of the Egyptian society.
- Youth are encouraged to become entrepreneurs, running their own income generation projects, some of which are cultural heritage ones. Under the State's auspices, banks and financial institutions are providing loans to youth at reasonable interest rates, accompanied by technical assistance and feasibility studies to help them manage successful projects.

Despite the above positive aspects, we are still having awareness and communication problems in various other issues:

In general, we are facing challenges to achieve inclusive sustainable development and Egypt vision 2030, as examples to this:

- Misleading media information and messages targeting certain categories and resulting in sectarian violence and conflicts.
- Climate changes and their great negative impacts on Egypt, being geographically and climatically in the Mediterranean region, one of the most affected regions by climate changes.
- High rates of population increase and hence high poverty rates and food security problems.

Membership challenges with key recommendations:

The current middle east region membership is quite inactive, as the middle east region committee has disintegrated, due to different personal reasons, like emigration or changing workplace, etc.

However, during the coming period, the plan is to communicate with existing members to re-activate their membership and to think together of means to revive work in the region.

Continuing to include new members in the region, where, potential new members are also being explored to be shared and discussed with WACC to join the membership. Worth noting the 3 new members have become members during the last few years.

We continue to request the support of WACC headquarters to provide support and motivation for new members to join WACC.

Three key proposals for future direction of WACC:

Exchange of Experiences:

- Where holding events is not very easy in some regions, for several reasons, it's recommended to have exchange of experiences between members and directors of various regions to go and attend events in other regions and come up with best practices and lessons learnt to be applicable in their own regions.
- Being CEOSS staff, and CEOSS being a distinguished Egyptian NGO in the field of development and culture, with various activities taking place, some exchange of experience visits can be arranged to WACC members to some events that feed into fostering communication.

Trainings and Capacity Building:

- Training workshops to build capacities of key actors and agents of change in the society, such as media, young pastors, civil society, development practitioners, especially in area of the relationship between development and communication.
- Helping the candidates that receive trainings and capacity building through WACC relationships and linkages to acquire scholarships from accredited entities.