

Analysis of Youth Participation in Arab Countries¹

Case study on Kuwait

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Prepared by:

Sarah Armoush, Beirut
Nadia Nahmeh, Beirut

Reviewed by:

Mayada Kanj, Beirut
Aline Germani, Beirut

Focus group facilitated by:

Mohamad Faiq Mahdi, Kuwait

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I. Introduction

This case study is developed in the framework of the **regional analysis** on the situation of youth in selected Arab countries, with a specific **focus on youth participation** in general, and the role of youth in policy making in particular.

The findings of the regional analysis will contribute to:

1. Increased understanding among policymakers of the issues faced by youth, including young women, particularly with regards to their equal participation in economic development.
2. Strengthened capacity of policy makers to formulate cross-sectoral policies that enhance effective participation of youth in economic, social, and political life.
3. Enhanced engagement between policymakers and youth groups in jointly designing, reviewing, and/or implementing youth-based policies for inclusive and sustainable development.

The regional analysis was guided by three key questions:

1. What is the degree of Arab youth participation in decision-making processes, particularly youth development policies, and how?
2. To what extent is youth participation in decision-making processes likely to improve the quality, responsiveness, impact and viability of development policies?
3. How can youth participation in the Arab countries be enhanced, and whose responsibility is it to ensure a larger space and stronger role for youth?

Objective

Case studies for three countries of the Arab region (Jordan, Tunisia and Kuwait) were developed with the aim to examine the following issues:

- What is the general situation of youth in Kuwait?
- What is the situation of Kuwaiti youth in relation to participation in decision-making?
- What meaning does the Kuwaiti youth give to the concepts of participation and decision-making?
- What factors encourage the implementation of effective youth participation in decision-making?
- What are the obstacles limiting the effective participation of young people in decision-making?

II. Methodology

This case study consolidates information from desk based research as well as through qualitative participatory research conducted with young people and stakeholders in Jordan. It consists of:

1. A **desk-based background search** relying on documentation found in the desk review search of the regional analysis and documentation from focal points in Jordan
2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**
 - 9 focus groups were organized for the purposes of the study and brought together young people of different age groups, ranging from 16 to 28, from both genders and different sociocultural categories.
3. **Interviews with key stakeholders:**
 - Individual interviews were conducted with three stakeholders who work in the field of youth development either through governmental bodies or through organizations.

III. Background on Youth in Kuwait

According to Kuwait's demographic estimate of 2017, the total population accounts for 4,289,631, of which 1,270,201 are Kuwaitis with a median age of 22 years².

Table 1 reflects that for the age group 15 to 24 years old, youth constitute a small portion of the population. However, if following the Kuwaiti national definition of youth which considers youth those aged between 14 and 34 years old, this portion becomes around 72%³.

Table 1 Youth Percentages in Kuwait⁴

% Kuwaiti Youth (15-24)		
%	<i>Among Youth</i> %Male	<i>Among Youth</i> % Female
19.5	51.0	49.0

² 2017 تقدير السكان في بداية عام 2017. <https://www.csb.gov.kw/>

³ التعداد العام للسكان في 2011. <https://www.csb.gov.kw/>

⁴ Calculated from 2017 تقدير السكان في بداية عام 2017 <https://www.csb.gov.kw/>

Table 2 Population Characteristics of Kuwaiti Youth (15-24) Stratified by Gender⁵

Youth unemployment rate ⁶			Youth literacy rate ⁷			Youth education level ⁸								
%	%M	% F	%	%M	%F	Elementary			Secondary			University degree		
						%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F
22.1	17.0	31.5	99.46	99.5	99.47	8.13	8.89	7.34	31.3	30.73	31.89	7.63	6.77	8.52

Table 2 points to a higher level of youth unemployment among females than males. This reflects gender differences in economic opportunities. Interestingly, youth in Kuwait seem to have approximately similar levels of literacy and education irrespective of gender, with the exception of the percentage of female youth with a university degree being almost double that of their male counterparts.

In 2015, Kuwait's Human Development Index (HDI) value was 0.800 placing it in the very high human development category; ranking 51 out of 188 countries and territories⁹. Between 1990 and 2015, Kuwait's HDI value increased from 0.713 to 0.800, representing an increase of 12.2 percent.

Table 3 reviews Kuwait's progress in each of the HDI indicators. Between 1990 and 2015 Kuwait's life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling increased¹⁰. Kuwait's GNI per capita increased by approximately 39.7 percent between 1990 and 2015¹¹.

⁵ This table refers to Kuwaiti Nationals only.

⁶ جدول 38: مقارنة معدل البطالة بين فئة الشباب بمعدل البطالة بين جميع السكان (15 - 64) حسب الجنسية (كويتي / غير كويتي) والنوع لعام 2015

https://lms.csb.gov.kw/ar/LaborForceGraphView.aspx?Graph_ID=2005

⁷ التوزيع النسبي للسكان (10 سنوات فأكثر) حسب الحالة التعليمية والجنسية والنوع لعام 2014

https://www.csb.gov.kw/Socan_Statistic.aspx?ID=18

⁸ Ibid

⁹ UNDP (2016). Human Development Report-Kuwait

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/KWT.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

Table 3 Kuwait Human Development Index indicators

	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011 PPP\$)	HDI value
1990	72.1	10.6	5.5	54,475	0.713
1995	72.7	11.6	5.8	91,233	0.747
2000	73.1	14.0	6.2	86,626	0.786
2005	73.5	14.1	6.1	102,756	0.787
2010	74.0	13.4	6.8	78,516	0.792
2011	74.1	13.2	7.0	80,857	0.794
2012	74.2	13.1	7.2	83,050	0.796
2013	74.3	13.0	6.7	80,066	0.787
2014	74.4	13.3	7.3	76,075	0.799
2015	74.5	13.3	7.3	76,075	0.800

In 2016, Kuwait had a Youth Development Index (YDI) of 0.678, ranking 56 out of 183 in the world. The YDI is a composite score of 18 indicators across the five domains of Civic Participation, Education, Employment and Opportunity, Health and Well-being, and Political Participation. Kuwait is within the ‘above average’ / ‘high’ category. The YDI indices are quite high across categories especially for health and wellbeing where Kuwait ranked 2 out of the 183 countries¹². In contrast in employment and political participation Kuwait ranked 127 and 139 respectively¹³.

Table 4 Youth Development Indices for Kuwait¹⁴

YDI	Political Participation	Health and Wellbeing	Employment and opportunity	Education	Civic Participation
0.678	0.415	0.884	0.486	0.843	0.620

A 2014-2015 Gallup poll also revealed data on the Civic Engagement Indices of Arab countries. This index is calculated using more indicators than that of the YDI in Table 4, and hence will be presented separately in order to offer an idea of youth civic engagement. Table 5 presents the score as well as the indicators (helping strangers, donating money, volunteering time) stratified by gender. Overall the civic engagement index is considered higher than the world average with the percentage of volunteering being the lowest among indicators reflecting that youth often contribute on short term basis such as the case of helping a stranger or through financial means rather than civic participation through

¹² Commonwealth(2016) “Global Youth Development Index and Report”

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Commonwealth (2016) “Youth Development Index and Report”

organizations or NGOs. In addition, the percentages are higher for young men than young women. This could be attributed to the fact that often women in Kuwait do not participate in activities as a result of restrictions from their families and due to cultural barriers as mentioned in the interviews with key stakeholders later on.

Table 5 Civic Engagement Index for Kuwait¹⁵

Civic Engagement index											
			% Youth donated money			% Youth volunteered time			% Youth helped a stranger		
Mean	Male mean	Female mean	%	%M	% F	%	%M	%F	%	%M	% F
43.5	47.3	38.8	42.6	50.6	33.2	14.1	15.8	11.9	75.3	78.5	71.4

Background on Youth Policy and Participation in Kuwait

1. Formal Structures for Youth and Youth Policy

The Ministry of State for Youth Affairs (MoSYA) is the main governmental body responsible for youth in Kuwait. In terms of policy, in 2012 and as a response to the Arab uprisings spanning the region, The National Youth Project (TNYP) was launched as a youth consultation project to devise strategic and developmental goals for youth. The result was a National Youth Document, as described on the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs website that includes recommendations in areas such as citizenship, education, economic development, housing, and health. As a follow up to this project, in 2013, a nation-wide campaign called “Kuwait Listens” was initiated to reach out for youth. 114 recommendations emerged which the government stated to have achieved by 80%¹⁶. In 2015, the Youth Public Authority was founded under the supervision of the ministry in order to plan and implement a youth empowerment strategy in collaboration with UNDP focusing on four main domains: leadership, creativity and innovation, national competitiveness and social cohesion¹⁷. The overarching mission of the authority is to tackle matters of concern for youth and provide them with a safe and empowering environment in collaboration with other stakeholders; aiming to promote the participation of youth for the positive development of Kuwait¹⁸.

¹⁵ Gallup (2014-2015) Civic Participation Index

¹⁶

<http://www.alshahedonline.net/new/2017/08/11/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B0-80-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%AA/>

¹⁷ UNDP (2017). “Youth Empowerment in Kuwait”.

http://www.kw.undp.org/content/kuwait/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/youth-empowerment-in-kuwait.html

¹⁸ Youth Public Authority (2017): <https://www.ypa.gov.kw/Home/About>

In 2017, a national youth survey was conducted. The findings of this survey are to be discussed with diverse youth groups across the different governorates of Kuwait¹⁹. The aim of this process is to formulate a national youth policy taking into account the recommendations of youth and stakeholders who work with youth groups. The policy is expected to be released in year 2018²⁰. Currently, since Kuwait was named the "Capital of Arab Youth of 2017", MoSYA intends to build on the momentum of this event in order to trigger and enhance the public's interest in youth empowerment issues²¹.

2. Youth Civic Participation

Youth civic participation in Kuwait is considered a bit higher than average. Data is scarce when it comes to measuring the outcomes of civic programs on youth and documenting these programs or initiatives. In 2012, in its report about 'Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa', Mercy Corps reported that 27% of young men were enrolled in civic groups while the percentage of young women enrolled in civic groups was 18%. These percentages indicate that although Kuwait is a high-income country, civic participation measured by enrollment in civic groups is not very high.

3. Youth Centers

Nine youth centers are directly linked to and supervised by MoSYA²². However, no further information was available about these centers or other centers from the desk review conducted and the information provided by focal persons.

4. Youth Political Participation

Youth in Kuwait are considered active when it comes to political participation. In universities, students elect representatives for their student unions without any interference from the government²³. These unions aim to cultivate political awareness among students and are considered very active in both public and private universities²⁴. Youth political participation is even widespread outside universities and institutes.²⁵ In addition, starting the age of 21, youth in Kuwait are able to elect members of the parliament.

¹⁹ Interview with Lina Al Qadumi (2017), youth engagement specialist with youth policy labs

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ UNDP (2017). "Youth Empowerment in Kuwait".

http://www.kw.undp.org/content/kuwait/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/youth-empowerment-in-kuwait.html

²² MoSYA website (2017)

²³ Info from Naser Al Sheikh(2017), director of research and youth development-MoSYA

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Info by Naser el Sheikh (2017), director of research and youth development MoSYA

5. Channels for Youth Participation in Kuwait

MoSYA and the Public Authority for Youth is the main entity which coordinates and promotes civic programs for youth in coordination with UNDP and other local organizations. Some of the main organizations which engage young Kuwaitis are²⁶:

- The Kuwait Voluntary Work Center; where young Kuwaitis can volunteer and engage in campaigns covering various topics such as environmental issues, culture conservation, working with children who have learning difficulties.
- LOYAC²⁷; a non-profit organization which focuses on the development of youth through the design and implementation of workshops and programs targeting the professional and personal growth of youth.
- INJAZ Kuwait; part of a larger network of NGOs and partner with businesses from the private sector, focuses on entrepreneurship, work readiness, personal and economic skills for young Kuwaitis through class-based sessions.

MoSYA aims to encourage youth in Kuwait to plan and implement community projects by sponsoring projects that youth can submit according to a set of criteria found on the ministry's website²⁸. The initiatives fall under the following themes: natural resources, science and technology, public health and promotional sports, culture and arts, awareness campaigns, urban planning, entrepreneurship, and scientific research. This program is unique regionally and even globally, as it provides up to USD 100 thousand per person and it supports public support institutions and youth groups. To this date, the Ministry has funded a total of 1044 initiatives. In addition, in order to support the youth-driven projects, MoSYA provides youth with capacity building-trainings and media coverage to facilitate the implementation and success of these projects²⁹. For further motivation for young people, the Emir of Kuwait presents to 10 outstanding young people a financial reward for their performance across various domains and their contribution to the progress of Kuwait as a state³⁰.

IV. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Stakeholder Interviews

1. Methodology

1.1 Focus Group Discussions

Participants were recruited from two schools, three universities and one organization called 'Project Be'. Overall, nine FGDs were conducted with a total of fifty six participants.

²⁶ Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP)(2017) - Kuwait

²⁷ LOYAC website (2017) : <https://www.loyac.org/about.aspx>

²⁸ MoSYA website (2017): https://www.youth.gov.kw/initiative/index_EN.aspx

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

Because in the first FGD conducted, there were twenty participants, the technical team from AUB advised the Kuwaiti consultancy team to decrease the number of participants in the next FGDs. Each FGD took approximately between one hour and two hours and were recorded through note taking. The first FGD was conducted on April 24, 2017 with participants from a mixed school attended by students from high socio-economic background and located in central Kuwait. Participants from this school included eight boys and twelve girls who were aged between 17 and 18 years old. The other school from where participants were recruited is not mixed and has two sections: one for boys and one for girls. Students in this school are from a religiously conservative background and from a distant governorate far from the capital. Participants from this school were all aged 16 years old. Two separate FGDs were conducted, on April 25, 2017, one with nine boys and one with seven girls. As for the universities from which participants were recruited, one of them is a renowned private university including students from diverse geographical areas and graduates of private schools. The FGD with participants from this university was conducted on 25 April, 2017 and included four girls and one guy.

The second university had students from diverse backgrounds who are graduates of either public or private schools. The FGD with participants from this university was conducted on April 24, 2017 including one guy and five girls. The third university has middle-class students coming from the six different governorates of Kuwait. Three separate FGDs were conducted with different participants from this university on April 26. One included seven girls and two included eight guys each. Overall, participants recruited from all universities were aged between 19 and 28 years old. As for participants who were recruited from Project Be they were volunteers and staff in the organization and participated in activities run by it; they were aged between 21 and 28 years old. The FGD included five guys and four girls.

1.2 Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were held with three key stakeholders in order to reflect on the state of Kuwaiti youth with regards to their participation in decision-making, as well as the current and projected policies to adopt in order to improve the level of participation of young people in decision-making. All three interviews were held in ESCWA quarters in Beirut when stakeholders came for a joint meeting with AUB technical team and ESCWA team. Each interview took around twenty minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed.

2. Findings

During the FGDs, young people were asked about their perception of their general situation with regards to their level of participation in decision-making, and the motives and barriers encountered in the process of participation in decision-making.

2.1 Understandings of youth participation in Kuwaiti youth

According to youth in the FGDs, overall they all agreed that "youth participation" refers to the engagement of youth in individual and community activities which encompass an array

of activities such as awareness campaigns, organizing sports tournaments and trips, environmental initiatives, etc...These activities according to participants lead to personal development and benefit the society as a whole. When alluring to 'participation in decision-making', some of the youth suggested that it refers to their ability to formulate and voice out opinions about matters that are of utmost significance and impact the society in general and youth specifically.

2.2 Youth participation in decision-making from the perspective of Kuwaiti youth

Overall, according to shared opinions from the nine focus groups, youth are often engaged in activities organized by academic entities such as schools or universities. However, youth reported that at several instances, the goals of an activity or what it entails were not clear to them and they would find themselves only receiving instructions and executing tasks rather than being in a leadership position or able to voice out an opinion when it came to decisions. They mentioned that only when activities were organized and run by the youth themselves is when they were able to assume responsibility and have a more significant role in decision-making. As such youth from FGDs believed that Kuwaiti youth have the potential when it comes to decision-making and participation but do not have adequate opportunities to expand these.

2.3 Youth participation in decision making from the perspective of stakeholders

Stakeholders had varying opinions in how they tackled the idea of youth participation in decision-making. One of the key stakeholders who is part of the founding board of a non-profit organization focused on decision-making among youth at the level of the family and by emphasizing the idea of volunteering as mentioned in the quote *"this program breaks a lot of social concepts in Kuwait as it promotes the idea that no matter how much money you have, you must still volunteer and accept to work in 52 degrees temperature and take the 50 dinars which you could have got from your dad..."* According to the same stakeholder, by choosing to travel and volunteer instead of traveling for leisure especially for youth from high socio-economic background, this is considered a significant change in youth participation *"today after 15 years the families in Kuwait started to think instead of where should I travel, where should my son work where should he volunteer"*.

The other two stakeholders mentioned that often youth find themselves executing tasks rather than being in leadership positions where they can inform decision-making. Hence, a discrepancy is created between youth and key actors in youth development such as governmental entities. One of the stakeholders attributed this disconnect to lack of adequate qualifications among some people in governmental entities to approach youth and involve them *"The leaders (most not youth) are on the same track but when it comes to execution (this level has youth) there are differences. We are facing the "know how" problem this results in weak implementation or quality of policies. This is due to lack of training or wrong people in wrong positions"*.

The other stakeholder who has been extensively involved in the process of formulating and drafting the national youth policy stated that the team working on the policy is young

including people aged 29 years old and younger. She also stated that youth were consulted and provided feedback about findings of national surveys and strategies. Yet, she suggested that key actors from the government are often dismissive and do not take into account input of youth as highlighted in this quote *“I just want the government to be with us, we are youth we know what is going on we are living this, but the ministry I don’t know how much they know and how much they are willing to know. There is issue of acceptance. When we were presenting our findings please do not publish this please do not publish this. They are very dismissive of the result.”*

Similarly to what was mentioned in the FGDs with the youth, one of the stakeholders stated that there are many informal channels of participation through which youth are engaging and have a more significant role in decision-making such as ‘Sout El Kuwait’ and ‘Raqeeb 50’ a monitoring observatory for politics.

2.4 Influencers of youth participation in decision-making

2.4.1. Family:

Youth from the FGDs stated that their families encouraged them to get involved in civic activities that benefit the society.

2.4.2. Cultural and Societal Values

In all nine FGDs, youth mentioned that religion was the most prominent motivator for them to engage in community service as they perceived it as a duty. Additionally, youth reflected that it is their patriotic duty to serve their communities as this will lead to the prosperity of Kuwait and pave the way for a positive future.

2.4.3. Civic participation

In terms of civic participation, youth from the FGDs stated different ‘causes’ that urged them to be civically engaged. Among the younger youth from schools these were related to social issues and developing their abilities. As for the older youth, these ‘causes’ included: conflict resolution, fighting terrorism, employment, corruption.

2.4.4. Political participation

All stakeholders agreed that youth are highly interested in political movements and that political participation is higher than civic participation due to the insufficient or lack of active NGOs and civil societies. A quote by one of the stakeholders demonstrates that *“There is always political movement in Kuwait and youth are always interested in parliament and there is participation and activism especially seminars in political movements. Youth in particular are very active compared to other Arab countries.”* Despite that many of the youth pointed out that they have trust issues with the government and questioned its transparency, there was a consensus that Kuwait was better than other countries, as youth perceived themselves able to engage in political matters. In FGDs with youth from universities, they stated that through students’ unions they are able to be civically engaged

and reach out to parliamentarians. Also, they stated that with time more youth are being able to acquire ministerial positions.

2.5 Obstacles facing youth participation in decision-making

As revealed in the findings, several obstacles and challenges confront youth participation in decision-making in Kuwait. Those are:

2.5.1. Political obstacles

While younger youth did not perceive any issues of transparency or corruption with the government, the older youth expressed distrust towards the government and questioned its transparency. Youth felt that because they are perceived as the weakest link, officials do not take them seriously, leading to a withdrawal of youth from participation. Many of the youth mentioned that 'favoritism' and 'nepotism' are quite common in the government; affecting how resources are channeled for youth projects. Hence, this would prevent them from engaging in government-related activities. Moreover, dialogue was perceived as lacking between youth and key stakeholders in the government and thus the need to have adequate forums and formal channels to reach out to these and be heard.

2.5.2. Economic obstacles

Financial barriers did not come up as an obstacle for participation except in one FGD where youth mentioned that funding for projects mainly comes from the government and there are limited sources of funding through which youth can fund their projects. One of the interviewed stakeholders alluded to the economic obstacle based on what they encountered in their line of work as illustrated by this quote *"we are certified in it and we have 6 teachers for this program but it costs too much and we have financial issues our budget is about 1,000,000 dinars so the financial issue is a parents decision to make and parents think that (Name of NGO) must serve for free or we don't pay for skills we buy a mobile we buy a car but for such courses they don't pay"*. In this case the financial issue revolves around the perceived priorities by parents rather than their inability to pay.

2.5.3. Social and cultural obstacles

In some of the FGDs, youth stated that they do not engage in some activities or projects because these did not correspond to their religious values. In addition, as highlighted by one of the stakeholders often families are too religiously conservative and do not allow their children to participate in activities. Additionally, in the FGDs that only included girls, some of them revealed that often activities do not cater for their interests or needs and are too oriented towards the guys' interests and needs. Hence they feel that they have limited opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts.

2.5.4. Schools and universities as obstacles

For the younger youth interviewed, participation was heavily mediated by schools. Accordingly, limitations in the resources in these schools affected participation. For some of the youth, the current school curriculum does not account for extra-curricular activities

or there isn't a youth club within the school that facilitates the implementation of civic projects.

2.5.5. Structural Obstacles

Stakeholders mentioned that youth civic engagement is mainly expressed through informal political participation such as political protests and social media platforms rather than formal channels or through civil societies and NGOs as phrased by one of them in this quote:

“As for civic engagement it is less compared to political engagement we suffer from low youth civic participation the ministry is trying to encourage civic participation and volunteering and ministry is working on programs but it's limited and there is youth involvement in these programs and some initiatives were successful but the quantity of youth involved in these initiatives is very minimal.”

In addition, youth expressed that there is lack of monetary compensation, recognition or incentive to trigger engagement.

V. Analysis

The analysis of the findings of the case study aims to answer the regional analysis three main research questions:

1. What is the degree of (country) youth participation in decision-making processes, particularly youth development policies, and how?
2. To what extent do youth perceive that participation in decision-making processes is likely to improve the quality, responsiveness, impact, and viability of development policies?
3. How can youth participation in the (country) be enhanced, and whose responsibility is it to ensure a larger space and stronger role for youth?

1. The Degree of Youth Participation in Decision-Making in Kuwait

Similarly to the cases of Tunisia and Jordan, the findings from the background search, interviews with key stakeholders and FGDs with youth reflected a shy meaningful participation of youth in decision-making. Referring back to Hart's Ladder of Participation and DFID's three-lens approach, meaningful participation implies engaging youth in actual decision-making processes and granting them partnership and leadership roles. In the case of Kuwait, youth are positioned as beneficiaries or are often engaged in consultative tasks rather than being approached as partners or even leaders.

In contrast to Jordan and Tunisia, as a result of an extensive process, Kuwait is moving forward towards the launching of an official youth national policy in 2018.³¹ Hence, it is deemed of utmost importance once this policy is released to examine how it will be implemented on the ground and translated into actions that take youth up on Hart's ladder of Participation and enables them to be actively involved in decision-making.

In practice, according to findings from key stakeholders, youth participation in Kuwait is manifested mainly at the political level while civic engagement remains low due to the scarce number of active NGOs in the Kuwaiti arena. Youth themselves often self-organize and launch initiatives targeted towards political matters. An example is 'Sout al Kuwait'; a web platform aiming to showcase the Kuwaiti constitution for youth to know their rights and under its umbrella, 'Raqeeb 50', an electronic observatory was launched to monitor the performance of parliamentarians. Similar to other countries, youth in Kuwait participated in street protests in order to ask for change in the government.

According to the findings from FGDs, youth are highly motivated by religion, social change and patriotic duty to participate in activities. The activities reported revolved mainly around health awareness, sports, attendance of workshops, charity events. Despite youth's understanding of participation as engaging in community service as agents of change and voicing their opinions about matters of interest in order to build the future; they were often approached with a tokenistic view from organizations or academic entities rather than being able to be pro-active in leadership tasks and decision-making. When activities were self-organized by youth, participation was higher on Hart's Ladder since youth are initiating and leading action.

Although religious duty was perceived as a motivator for youth to be civically engaged, main barriers that hinder youth participation included religious and cultural barriers. Some of the youth were resistant to the idea of having mixed-gender activities or felt activities did not correspond to their religious values and often parents feared having their children involved in projects. Also, similarly to what was stated by key stakeholders, the lack of NGOs that address youth needs and actively involve them was a main barrier for participation. Often projects put forward by organizations or governmental initiatives did not align with youth's interests. This again highlights the need to have youth on board of projects from their inception to their implementation rather than instilling a top-down approach which ends up demotivating them from participation.

In addition, it was noteworthy that a discrepancy emerged between findings of FGDs with youth when tackling matters of transparency and trust in the government. Some of the

³¹ It is worth noting that the Ministry considers youth as partners and not just beneficiaries, as evidenced by the fact that the national youth policy is based on partnership with youth. Additionally, Law 100 mandates the establishment of the General Authority for Youth, expressly mandates the establishment of a council of youth to involve them in the decision-making process.

younger youth found the government to be trustworthy, just and not corrupted as claimed. In contrast, other youth expressed a lack of trust in the government highlighting a widespread of corruption and nepotism. This discrepancy between views among youth was confirmed by key stakeholders who alluded to the idea that younger youth tend to have more trust and express support towards the government in comparison to older youth who challenge the government and exert pressure for change.

Despite the sense of being perceived as recipients rather than actors and the voiced concern towards the integrity of the government, FGDs with youth revealed that Kuwait is perceived as one of the prominent countries in active youth political participation. Youth's political role is fulfilled especially through elections of university unions, and parliamentary elections. Youth reflected hope which was not expressed in the other case studies as more youth are being engaged in the political field; with time more ministerial posts are being taken on by youth and more communication is being initiated with the parliament.

2. Youth Perceptions of the Role of Participation in Decision-Making in Development

As evidenced by the responses of young people in FGDs, civic and political participation are significant for personal and social development. Youth were keen on linking participation with the acquirement of skills that would enable them to build the future of their country. They stressed on the idea that if youth were being actively involved in decision-making this would lead to an increase in their sense of responsibility, self-confidence and patriotism. Hence, in the case of Kuwait, youth all seem to be quite familiar with the notion of participation and its impact on society. As reflected by both the FGDs and interviews, the benefit of youth's participation transcends the personal development of youth as it leads to a more positive development of the society as a whole.

3. Enhancing Youth Participation: Main Actors and Stakeholders

There is a consensus from focus group discussions and interviews with key stakeholders that the enhancement of youth participation needs the involvement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders.

The main actor according to both young people and key stakeholders is the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs (MoSYA) especially that it is at the forefront of youth matters and is the main entity behind the national youth policy which will be released. The role of the ministry according to findings needs to surpass the organization of sports events and tournaments and workshops. It should entail more active participation of youth at the decision-making level rather than the consultative level. Youth highlighted the need for the ministry to invest in youth centers, organizations and spaces where youth can convene and take on more leadership responsibilities in planning local and national activities.

Another significant issue that arose was the existing disconnect between the ministry and other stakeholders including youth where the approach of the ministry could be restrictive and impede the projects that some organizations or youth want to engage in. Therefore, in order to overcome this disparity, the ministry needs to initiate communication with youth groups and stakeholders. In parallel, key stakeholders agreed that the government should lower the current candidacy age as it will increase youth participation.

Academic entities such as schools and universities were perceived by youth as not promoting civic and political participation as much as they should. Hence, the need to revisit the curriculum of schools which are the first space where youth engage in civic participation. Also, youth participation could be fostered by expanding facilities and funds for these academic entities channeled towards civic engagement.

Moreover, staff in schools or universities can receive capacity building trainings in order to shift their approach towards youth from a tokenistic to a more relational approach.

As mentioned earlier, the limited number of civil societies and NGOs in the Kuwaiti arena hinders youth participation as voiced by young people and stakeholders. Young people expect more from these organizations as they consider them to be impartial and able to create opportunities for youth to be actively engaged; leading to positive change in the country.

In some of the FGDs with young people, families and religious institutions were attributed a role in encouraging youth participation by motivating young people to engage in meaningful activities. Hence, activities with parents and communication with religious leaders can be initiated since youth refer back to them and consider them role models.

As such, these findings indicate that fostering youth participation in Kuwait requires the coordinated efforts of multiple actors. At the moment, the role of civil society remains shy.

When conducting the desk review, the work of very few organizations was retrieved with one of them being the most active and known in Kuwait. Many of the initiatives in Kuwait are being led by youth groups and represent an informal participation. The documentation attributed to these initiatives is either insufficient or non-existing; hence the need to reach out to these groups and think of ways to formalize their participation as they represent a key stakeholder.

In addition, documenting success stories could potentially lead to best practices and tools that other stakeholders can scale up and replicate.

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