

SACWA IV

Action Research Team (ART) Proposed Project:

***A Feasibility Study on the possibility of creating a
'Local Community Participation Model'
in a selected number of pilot schools in Qatar and Oman***

Submitted to:

**The Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research and
the Globalisation Research Centre, The University of Hawaii**

Submitted by:

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**The enclosed research project has been submitted as an intended
contribution to the GRAD Project, in particular, *'The Struggle for
Democracy in West Asia in the Context of Global and Regional Conflicts'*.**

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The Context

Sixty percent of the population of West Asia (the Gulf littoral states) is under the age of 25. With more of its citizens in schools and universities than in the workforce, the region faces increased demand for employment and public services. So, too, will this new generation make demands for political and economic reform which will include a greater degree of citizen participation in political decision making.

In a series of articles written for the Qatari and wider Arab press in December 2001, Qatar University's Dean of Islamic Law, Abd Al-Hamid Al-Ansari, identified another concern for the rulers of the Gulf countries, namely, the need to combat incitement to hatred and violence in the false name of Islam. The reason for the phenomenon of terrorism in the Middle East, he explained, is that a culture of violence is easily absorbed by those who have been exposed to inappropriate education. This culture, Al-Ansari explained, is rooted in the minds of those who have suffered from a closed education that leaves no room for pluralism. 'I am one of those interested in re-examining the Islamic curricula and removing all seeds of hatred, repulsion, and fanaticism towards the other, towards women, towards those whose religion is different than ours, or towards those belonging to a different school of [Islamic] thought.'

At the recent SACWA IV conference held in Cyprus from 29 to 31 March 2002, the 'struggle for democracy in West Asia' was the focus of discussion, debate and proposed models for change in the region. Among the conclusions reached was the need to develop strategies for citizenship participation in political decision making if democracy is to have a chance. Democracy is understood to be a crucial ingredient for peace with justice for which the region is in dire need.

In discussions of the problems in West Asia concerning the obstacles to political and economic change, the conference participants identified four areas which might become the focus of an ART (Action Research Team) project. These were:-

- 1) Politics
- 2) Economics
- 3) Social Services
- 4) International, trans-national and regional issues

It is with the third category, Social Services, that this grant application is concerned. The focus area is education.

The Problem

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a hopeful time for democracy. One after the other, oppressive regimes in the Philippines, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and South Africa, disintegrated in the face of 'people power' movements. Free elections were held and popularly elected governments were established. Many social scientists concluded that the transition from non-democracy to democracy is a natural and

inevitable outcome of social and economic development, even though there might be delays and even reverses during the transitional period.

It did not take long for the transition paradigm to break down. Many countries which were assumed to be moving towards democracy (such as Moldova, Zambia, Cambodia and Guinea) assumed only superficial features of democracy without a real devolution of power away from their political elites. Even the holding of regular and genuine elections has not been able to overcome this problem in many countries in South America and in Nepal. It has become evident that the specific institutional legacies from predecessor regimes has weighed heavily against any transition to democracy. The various assumed component processes of democratisation, e.g., the development of political parties, the building of institutions of civil society, judicial reform and liberalisation of media laws, have frequently been chaotic and have failed to take root. The underlying problem remains the wide gulf between political elites and citizens in non-democratic countries which is based in structural conditions such as the concentration of wealth or certain socio-cultural traditions. The same analysis may be applied to the states of West Asia which have, to-date, not shown signs of real transition towards democratic reform, in particular, reform that would lead to citizenship participation in local or national governance.

In the developing world today, the most common political form is something between full-fledged democracy and coarse dictatorship. But regimes in this position do not remain static. They either become ossified under the weight of their own inflexibility or, more rarely, they develop a system for the managed and gradual devolution of economic and political power by encouraging the growth of alternative centres of power within their own communities.

The specific requirements for any devolution program will vary according to the defining political, social and economic conditions in each State. What is needed is the development of alternative centres of power where community participation can take root and develop but what precisely that will mean will vary from State to State. However, as a general principle, the development of community participation at the local level seems to offer the least disruptive possibilities. If the model is to succeed, two pre-conditions must be satisfied:-

- a) the model itself must incorporate a mechanism for the education of those participating;
- b) the participation itself must lead to at least a limited form of decision making at the local level.

Participation is fundamental to the rights of individuals so they have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Popular participation in local-level decision-making will be meaningless unless it proceeds from a base of knowledge about the issues being discussed. Such knowledge requires either a program of education which is external to the decision making process itself or alternatively intensive education about the issues during the participation process itself. Community participation that does not lead to

decision making of some form will be sterile and ultimately only serve to alienate further those whom it is intended to engage.

A key to evolutionary change in favour of citizenship participation at the local and national levels of decision-making is the development of appropriate institutions both within the state and in civil society. These include: systems of elections and voting, involvement of civil society organizations and the development of an institutional base for participation as well as issues of devolution and decentralisation. The existence of a healthy civil society is considered paramount as the pressure exerted on state and local government institutions by citizens' organizations is key to the development of accountability and democracy.

Such changes, if they are to proceed in West Asia, will require from the outset well-planned programs of education and small group learning in a community participation context. Change management in any context requires the establishment of a variety of educational processes suitable to the circumstances. One of the desired outcomes is to educate participants about the issues they are being called upon to discuss and decide on. Another desired outcome is to create among participants a sense of ownership of, and commitment to, the final outcome. The development of school and tertiary curricula will be of paramount importance in delivering the kind of long-term social consensus without which the permanency of reform cannot be guaranteed.

An ideal environment in which to develop a local community participation model is a school, a body made up of students, Executive and parents, the latter concerned with the process of decision-making and its outcomes. Such an environment provides a microcosm for a particular community which will allow the appropriateness of both the curricula which are adopted and the adoption process to be assessed.

Participation is about people – either as individuals or groups – and this requires an understanding of the different circumstances, backgrounds, capacities, opportunities, power, resources and influences that different peoples will have in different local and national contexts. For this reason, the approach to any community participation scheme will vary from State to State and perhaps also from community to community.

The Project and its Objectives

Title:

*A Feasibility Study on the possibility of creating a
'Local Community Participation Model'
in a selected number of pilot schools in Qatar and Oman*

In order to assess the possibility of establishing a local community participation model for the development of citizenship participation and civil society in West Asia, it is proposed that this ART conduct a feasibility study in two states, thus creating a minimum of four pilot schemes, i.e. in two schools per state. Qatar and Oman have been identified as the two states for the following reasons.

- 1) In Qatar last year, an important connection was made between SACWA and the University of Qatar. It is the view of this ART that SACWA's Chair, Qatari Ambassador Nasser Al-Khalifa, would be supportive in re-establishing that connection with the intention to provide introductions to academics in the Faculty of Education and Islamic Law. If this was successful, and a link was established between our ART and Qatar University, an important step would be achieved in gaining government support for our proposal. Further, this ART would gain access to academics from those Faculties which would be considered central to assisting in the writing of curricula.
- 2) Oman would provide an important point for comparison with Qatar which would be valuable for our quantitative research. Whilst Qatar has relatively high access to education for its citizens, for example, Oman has relatively low access.
- 3) In addition to access, there is also a difference in the nature of society in both countries in relation to city/rural ratios.

Overview of Project: Presuppositions (Column One) and Information to be accessed through Feasibility Study

	INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
GOAL: To strengthen democracy in West Asia			
PURPOSE: To increase understanding of citizenship participation in West Asia			
OUTPUTS: 1) Citizenship education introduced 2) Civil Society strengthened 3) Capacity of media to strengthen democracy increased 4) Increased participation in political life 5) 'Modernised' religious institutions			
ACTIVITIES:			

The Three Year Plan

Phase One: The Feasibility Study

Estimated timeframe: 12 months

It is intended that a minimum of two members of our ART will travel to Qatar and Oman on two occasions within a year in order to gather the necessary material and establish the required contacts to move to Phase Two of the Project (the implementation of recommendations made by the ART resulting from the Phase One of the project). This ART will require minimum one (possibly two) face-to-face meetings at an agreed time during the first year of the project.

The details of Phase One are as follows:

1) In order to develop a model for local community participation in selected schools in Qatar and Oman, a number of questions must be asked concerning access, capacity to deliver an education program (both formal and informal), what form the content of the curricular will take, and the security of resources.

2) Having identified the point of entry for our feasibility study, our ART will conduct a GAP-analysis. Questions such as :

- Who has access to education?
- Who is excluded?
- What resources are available?
- What is the present content of curricula in relations to participation and democracy (peace studies is also of interest)?

3) Citizenship participation can take place within the government, the market, and civil society. All three have the potential to assist or obstruct the process of change. All three therefore must be viewed as having a role to play in developing the model proposed in this application. Accordingly, our ART will need to identify political and social actors in these three 'institutions' in an effort to find working partners in development.

4) A SWOT analysis will be an important objective of the feasibility study.

5) Our research methods will therefore include:

- Use of questionnaires, Situation Analysis, SWOT Analysis, Stakeholders Analysis, etc.
- Focus on curriculum development for formal education (schools) and informal education (Civil Society)

6) Throughout the process of investigation, our ART team will maintain regular communication as well as developing contacts with other experts in the field, inside and outside the region. From the outset, our ART will establish an efficient technical infrastructure to serve all needs of the project including:

- (a) stable and secure communication system (e.g. video conferencing, internet based facilities such as mailing-lists, discussion groups etc) and ,
- (b) easy-to-use globally reachable, internet-based infrastructure to host the project in such a way that contributions to the system (i.e., uploading of projects, ideas, reports, newsletters, curriculum units) as well as access to the system (i.e., access of users to the various components of the curricula, and/or other information published within the system for global distribution) are transparent and intuitive.

The project's Assistant Co-ordinator, Yiannis Laouris, has already established a facility for our ART on the Peace portal www.tech4peace.org.

Phase Two: Implementation of Recommendations

Estimated timeframe: 2 years

The planning for this second stage of the three-year project will be developed from the findings and recommendations of the feasibility study as to creating four pilot '*Local Community Participation Models*'. It is intended that funding for Phase Two will be sought during the latter months of Phase One.

Financing and Institutional Participation

We request the maximum funding available from The Toda Institute and The Globalisation Research Centre at The University of Hawaii in the light of the time and work required for the feasibility study. In addition to these funds, members of our ART will attempt to secure further funding and/or other types of support using their respective affiliations and/or contacts. See below for details.

The Project Co-ordinator, Dr. Piggott, will be responsible for preparing and disseminating three-month reports to the following parties:

- (a) Funding organizations
- (b) Potential and/or future funding organizations affiliated with the project.
- (c) All participating members and/or affiliated bodies of the project.

Research Output

The feasibility study will result in a publication of our findings and recommendations for implementation, that is, a 'Needs & Requirements' document.

Research Timetable

As indicated above, this is a three-year project, in the first instance. The first year will be taken up by conducting the feasibility study and the publication of our findings. Work will begin within a month of securing the required seed funding.

The following two years will entail the implementation of the first stage of the recommendations that come from the study.