

A Prospectus for a Program on:

**“Workforce Development in the Arab Middle East:
Developing Public/Private Partnerships for Youth Employment”**

Introduction

Improving the employability of youth, and the productivity of employing organizations, are key development goals everywhere. In the Arab Middle East, progress towards these goals is essential to equitable economic growth, to the development of democratic institutions – and thus to peace. This Prospectus outlines a Program of capacity building for public/private partnership development that will contribute to improved employment for youth in the Region. The Program will support the work of public and private employers and educators who are actively engaged in partnership development and management. It has been developed initially by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), the Education for Employment Foundation (EFE) the Center on Education and Training of the Ohio State University (OSU), and the Education Development Center (EDC). Additional partners that share the goals of the proposed Program are welcome for professional collaboration and financial contributions.

It is anticipated that the Program will be launched in March of 2006 with a strategic planning meeting, leading to a regional capacity building Regional Workshop in September of the same year. These events will be linked through continuing Web-based collaboration and technical support. Together, these activities are expected to contribute to the establishment of a continuing regional community of practice on skills development for youth employment.

Employment for Youth: A Regional Priority

The cornerstone of prosperity in any nation is job growth among organizations in both the public and private sectors. Job growth in the private sector is especially critical because it has a multiplier effect beyond the immediate wages that provides and it fosters greater potential for entering external markets. Underlying any management decision is the availability of a skilled workforce to support the work. Increasingly, the local workforce – or the profile of individuals in a geographic entity – has become part of an organization’s infrastructure, similar to that of its physical and financial resources. For instance, if a start-up company seeks to provide outsourced services to other organizations, managers would need to ascertain whether, say, specific computer and language skills – or at least the prerequisite competencies – are available locally. Thus, the availability of a trained workforce has become a global issue of concern shared by governments, schools, and businesses.

Job growth in both the private and public sectors is of particular concern among nations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The UNDP Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), 2002 cited “advancing knowledge” as one of three great tasks for advancing the capabilities of the Arab peoples. In his introduction to the 2003 HDR, the UNDP Administrator noted that “the potential for developing the knowledge capabilities of Arab

countries is enormous—not only because of untapped human capital but also because of their rich cultural, linguistic and intellectual heritage.”

Relatively low overall employment levels in MENA nations has been particularly difficult for youth between ages 15 and 24. Contrary to the demographics of most western nations which face declining numbers of youth, 29.6% of the populations in MENA countries are youth, a proportion that has not changed substantially from 1993 to 2003. According to the ILO Global Employment Report for Youth (2004), the Middle East and North Africa have the third largest net growth (after Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) in the youth labor force between 2003 and 2015.

The demographic problem has yielded challenging economic, educational, and social issues. Of importance here are the continuing barriers of integrating youth into the workforce. Worldwide, youth participation in the labor market is declining, a result largely of increasing educational attainment among youth. Despite the fact that MENA countries have relatively good survival from entry to completion of primary school, girls in particular still face substantial barriers in gaining access to schooling and a number of the countries have high illiteracy rates. Youth in the MENA region have the lowest participation rate in the labor market across all regions. In 2003 only 39.7% of youth in the region were working, in comparison to a worldwide average of 54.9%.

Moreover, the unemployment rate for youth is 25.6% overall for youth. Girls, in particular, have even higher unemployment rates with a region wide average of 31.7% in 2003 in comparison to 22.7% for men. In contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa rates are 18.4% for girls and 23.1% for boys. The ratio of youth to adult unemployment in the region is 3:1. The unemployment problem in MENA is therefore significant for adults as well as youth. This unemployment rate, however, understates the problem as many youth in MENA are not even in the labor force. Over half of the youth population is in effect out of the labor force in MENA, in comparison to a rate of just over 30% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Unemployment status unfortunately continues after youth have completed education. Schooling, as traditionally configured, does not solve the problems of labor force transitions. As a recent presentation shows, educated workers make up a substantial portion of the unemployed in places such as Egypt and Jordan. In fact, in Jordan's case over 30% of the unemployed in 2002 had university degrees (ILO, 2002). Secondary school students were a much smaller proportion of the total unemployed. In other countries such as Bahrain, Algeria, and Egypt students with higher education were more than 10% of total unemployed population.

Challenges to Education and Training Systems

Despite such substantial labor market problems, there are many reasons that the governments are having a difficult time addressing problems with youth unemployment. First and foremost, many of the countries face daunting barriers in terms of educating equally for both men and women. There are substantial differences in terms of the access to education by men and women, including access to vocational skills training. The system in Saudi Arabia provides

an indication of the type of issues we face in serving governments. Historically, Saudi Arabia's department dedicated to vocational education serves men and women separately. The administration of the system of women is separated, and men receive different opportunities for skills training than women. Moreover, because of the large discrepancies in terms of labor market participation, the signals for women in terms of enrolling and to employers for hiring are different (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 2002).

While the educational systems offer different opportunities for both men and women, there is overall relatively low access to vocational education and training through the public sector. With the exception of Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, and Lebanon the proportion of upper secondary students enrolled in vocational or technical subjects is less than 30% of the total secondary enrollment. In most countries of the region (for example, Jordan, Tunisia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) the proportion of secondary enrollees in technical or vocational education falls below 20%. Saudi Arabia's enrollment in vocational education stands at a mere 4% of total enrollment at the secondary level (UNESCO, 2005). The global average for 2002 is approximately 19% of upper secondary enrollments, although Europe approaches 50% and East Asia 34%.

Moreover, even if the proportion of students enrolled varies substantially, the current literature points to serious problems with the quality of the public provision of vocational education in the Middle East. As Al Hetti & Brock (1997) recount, there are substantial problems with both the content and level of specialization of technical education and training. Recent project reports from international agencies and academic dissertations confirm this continuing issue with quality. A study of Saudi Arabia's vocational education system reports that the current five year plan for the education system cites significant challenges in structuring the school to work transition for youth (Abdulaziz, 2004).

Recent studies by the World Bank on Egypt confirm that there are major structural barriers in Egypt that prevent high quality vocational education, and raise the question about the relationship between education and the labor market (Antoninis, 2001; Gill & Heyneman, 2000). These statements about Egypt mirror comments made about other nations in the region. In the case of Jordan, authors of a case study pointed to the lack of structural connections between educational planning and economic planning (Tzannatos & Billeh, 2000). Another recent report on Tunisia similarly stresses the importance of making sure that educational and employment planning are integrated (World Bank, 2004). These country level reports continue a long tradition of stressing the disconnect worldwide between vocational education planning and employment (Middleton, Ziderman & Adams, 1993).

Partnerships between public and private skills training organizations on the one hand, and both public and private employers on the other, hold considerable promise for more relevant and better quality skills development for youth, and hence better employment outcomes. Realizing this promised calls for finding ways to improve the effectiveness of these public/private partnerships. Public and private organizations in the region have accumulated experience in building such partnerships, but knowledge and expertise is widely scattered and difficult to access. Equally, broader global experience in partnership development is seldom systematically adapted for use in the Region's countries.

A Way Forward

Many countries have made progress on linking education and economic development, and increasing the role of the private sector has consistently been seen as a key strategy to enable this to occur. The Program will enable participants from the private and public employment and education sectors, to share their goals for and experience in partnerships for youth training and employment. Participants in the Program will also become critically familiar with broader international experience with partnerships for youth employment. Broader and deeper knowledge will strengthen progress towards the goal of more effective partnerships that improve the employability of youth, the productivity and competitiveness of private firms, and the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations..

The Program will support progress toward these goals through two objectives:

- Creation of partnership development action plans for each participating country team and mechanisms for follow-up support
- Initiation of a Regional network to facilitate continuing technical and professional collaboration between the public and private sectors to improve employment opportunities for youth.

In approaching these objectives, the Program will address the following critical questions:

- What are the implications of the current youth demographic situation for each of the major societal stakeholders: government, schools, and companies?
- What role can each major stakeholder play in addressing the situation?
- What are the elements of partnership models that could further the efforts of the major stakeholders?
- Are these partnership models and their elements equally effective across nations?
- What barriers exist that might hinder the effectiveness of the partnership models? What incentives can help partners overcome these barriers?
- What can be done to support the work of professionals across the Region in their continuing search for new and more effective approaches to youth employment and development?

The Program is proposed not as a single solution in the search for answers to these complex questions, but rather as contribution to strengthening the ongoing professional and technical collaboration across the Region that will support continuing learning and innovation based on experience.

Initiating Organizations and Program Management Committee

The four initiating organizations are actively engaged across the region in addressing the issues of youth, work and economic development. Through the Educational Quality Improvement Project 2 (funded by USAID), AED is supporting work by the governments of

Jordan and Egypt to better prepare youth for the workforce and to enhance the school-to-career transition. In Morocco, AED is supporting the Government and USAID in the implementation of a reform of non-formal vocational training and secondary technical education, with a focus on gender equity. The privately funded Education for Employment Foundation is seeking to replicate a partnership model for employers and private educational and training institutions. For example, EFE is developing a new model for nursing education in Egypt and a Career Training Centre in Jordan. The Center for Education and Training of the Ohio State University has a long and distinguished record of research in US domestic and international vocational education and, through graduate programs, the preparation of researchers and policy makers, many of whom are from the Arab Middle East. In the West Bank/Gaza, The Education Center (EDC) is working with USAID, the Palestinian National Authority, and the NGO community in implementing a youth leadership program that focuses on livelihood development, civic engagement, and community involvement. The program has a specific emphasis on creating opportunities for girls and involving all youth in the development of their own communities and country.

The Program Management Committee, currently representing the four initiating organizations, will include representatives of partner organizations that can contribute to the goals and objectives of the Program through professional and partial financial support.

An Advisory Committee made up of leading experts in the fields of youth employment and skills development from the Region will be formed to take an active role in shaping the Program agenda.

Annex I: Proposed Organization of the Program

1. When and Where

1. Interactive planning with participating country teams will commence March 2006 at a venue in or near the region. The Regional Workshop will take place in September 2006 in a country in or near the region.

2. Participants

In keeping with the theme of the Program -- to review and generate new knowledge about public-private partnerships -- we expect to invite a small number of participants with a high level of experience in organizing or funding partnerships between organizations and education providers for youth from 4-5 countries in the Region. It is expected that the number of participants will be approximately 25-35. Of these we expect three definite "groups" to participate, including 1) representatives from companies or business associations, 2) representatives from higher or vocational education and training, and 3) selected government or international agency representatives.

There are several extenuating contingencies governing decisions about whom to invite. First and foremost, the sites need to be representative of the countries that funding partners are active within. These include Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Palestine. Participation will also be sought from Saudi Arabia and Gulf States.

Secondly, participants should represent key business leaders working in this area in the region. This should include not only owners or leaders of career education institutions, but also human resource executives/managers who have been involved with vocational or higher education in cooperative education or apprenticeships. Clearly, preference in this case should be given to identifying 'stars' -- those individuals who have distinguished themselves by their personal work. In this regard, some of the entrepreneurs that serve on EFE's board or individuals that OSU has been involved with in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia over time might be useful to invite.

Finally, the program is expected to include representatives from key international agencies.

3. Language

The official language of the Workshop will be English; the possibility of simultaneous interpretation English and Arabic is being considered.

4. Documentation

The Program would be supported by country case papers that document experience in the establishment and operation of public/private partnerships for youth education and employment, by a select number of technical papers, and by a Program website. It is expected that the Program papers and a summary of the proceedings will be published in both electronic and print formats.

5. Management Committee Members as of September 22, 2005:

- The Academy For Educational Development (AED)
 - Keith MacAllum, Senior Technical Advisor, Education and Workforce Development
 - John Middleton, Consultant/Advisor
- The Education For Employment Foundation (EFE)
 - Ronald B. Bruder, Founder and CEO
 - L. Michael Hager, President
- Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University (OSU)
 - Ronald L. Jacobs, Center Director and Professor
 - Joshua Hawley, Assistant Professor of Workforce Development
- Educational Development Center
 - Paul Sully, Director, Education Quality Improvement Project 3
- Victor Billeh, Former Director, ILO Regional Office, Beirut

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