INVESTING IN YOUTH IN THE MENA REGION: HOW TO OPERATIONALIZE YOUTH INTERVENTIONS (II)

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Introduction: The objective of this Fast Brief, presented in two parts, is to illustrate several concrete examples from MNA, ECA and LAC of youth-focused AAA, investment lending, and grant-funded engagements, which can inform the growing work program in the region.

The Arab World’s Youth Bulge: Despite all the efforts to promote growth and significant investments in education by Arab countries, a large segment of Arab youth continues to remain outside of the mainstream of economic and social life. In 2006, the Middle East and North Africa already exhibited the highest youth unemployment rate in the World (24.6% and 25.7% respectively) as well as the largest gender gap in unemployment. Recent estimates predict that as a result of the economic crisis, youth unemployment could increase by a further 4.6% in the Middle East and up to 4% in North Africa over the 2008-2009 periods, and impact particularly on young women.

Relevant research and experience shows that traditional single-sector policies and interventions offer only partial solutions to this challenge. Unless a youth-focused approach across multiple dimensions is established and interventions are developed with a sizable critical impact at the community level\(^2\), the needed results will not materialize. This approach complements traditional sector-based investments.

The six case studies included in the two briefs illustrate scalable self-standing interventions in support of youth development. Following examples from the ECA and LAC region in the previous issue, the current issue focuses on ongoing and completed experiences in MNA.

A - Providing school drop-outs with equivalency education, job training and life skills in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan\(^3\): The project, initiated through a JSDF\(^4\) grant through the Ministry of Social Development and the NGO Questscope\(^5\), supports working children and youth in earning income in day jobs while attending evening classes in public schools. Certified teachers help youth earn a proficiency certificate (10th grade level), leading to vocational certification. Vocational graduates also receive business-management training, enhancing future employability and livelihood options. Other learning elements include: coaching in life, social and coping skills, which will help youth to integrate into society. Young participants express increased self-confidence and improved relations with family, friends and authority figures.


3 Semlali. A. “MENA Youth Employability and Job Matching Challenges and Opportunities” (2009). Dr. Curt Rhodes, Director Questscope International. www.questscopec.org

4 The Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF) was established in June 2000 by the Government of Japan (GoJ) and the World Bank as a united mechanism for providing direct assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable groups in eligible World Bank group member countries. Since inception, GoJ has provided $396 million to the JSDF program, and 278 grants with a total value of $295 million have been approved.

5 For more on this Youth oriented private voluntary organization please see www.Questscope.org
The primary outcome of the JSDF program was the development of a “Street Education” program based on the Paulo Freire Education Model (PEM) and integration into the Ministry of Education’s 3-Year Alternative Education Curriculum, which supported learning among school dropouts to complete the course and obtain a 10th grade equivalency certification. Since the introduction of the new methodology and certification, 80,000 to 100,000 school dropouts (between the ages of 10-18) have benefitted from the 10th grade certification program to diversify their training and employment opportunities.

In 2007, Jordan’s Ministry of Education authorized Questscope’s Non Formal Education Program as the official program to an alternative 10th grade certification. This is a unique Government-NGO partnership and the first certification program for children who cannot compete in the formal system. There is also an interest in making further policy changes as a result of the successful integration of school drop-outs. New changes may allow youth to continue in secondary education after completing 10th grade equivalency. So far, 98 percent of those who sit for the 10th grade proficiency test pass. The cost for each child is around US$350 per year.

B - Improving Employability of Marginalized Youth in Syria through Enhanced Capacity and Local Partnerships: The JSDF awarded a 2.4 Million US$ grant in July 2009 for an integrated youth development project targeted to “disadvantaged” youth - defined as out of work for more than 2 years and with less than a 9th grade education.

The program’s objectives are to:

- Improve employability and job placement opportunities;
- Deliver targeted technical training and work skills in two pilot governorates;
- Build partnerships across providers of youth service and develop the organization capacities of local institutions and NGOs to respond to the needs of the labor market and to the psychosocial needs of beneficiaries.

The program will be implemented by a Syrian NGO with experience in youth employment programs, the Syria Trust for Development. The project relies on the development of partnerships between vocational institutions and the establishment of a network of referral services to be offered to marginalized youth in order to assist them in skills training and employment. Two Private Sector Councils of employers will be formed to hire marginalized youth in Damascus and Aleppo and define critical content for curricula. Vocational training schools and NGOs will receive training and capacity building on (i) life skills and entrepreneurship development and improved vocational training design and implementation; (ii) techniques for better case management and psychosocial support; and (iii) upgraded training equipment. Participants will rely on supporting job matching services, including counseling and advisory services and an interactive database of job opportunities and skill requirements based on employer surveys in Damascus and Aleppo. A rigorous impact evaluation program will be in place.

The expected outcomes include:

- Enhanced technical and work skills for 10,400 marginalized youth;
- 50% of trained youth to be employed within 8 months of completing the program;
- 20% of trained youth to develop entrepreneurial skills;
- 50% of trained youth who do not enter employment to enroll in further education;
- Government Vocational schools to introduce education/training services for marginalized youth.

C - Morocco ESW on Youth Inclusion: This operationally oriented ESW places the young people of Morocco at the center of the analysis, as clients of public policies and services across sectoral boundaries. The objectives are to (i) identify the key factors leading to the social and economic exclusion of young people aged 15 to 29 years on the basis of rigorous data analysis; (ii) provide an investment roadmap for youth inclusion across participating ministries; (iii) support with data and analysis the national youth strategy that is currently being formulated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The preliminary research is informing the Country Partnership Strategy, highlighting the potential scope for follow-up assistance.

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6 For more on this see: http://www.ac.wwu.edu/~sibrown/freire.htm
The ESW relies on an innovative nationally-representative survey of 2,000 households and 3,000 youth, which will match data on youth economic inclusion, community participation and active citizenship with their use of key public services. The survey will highlight critical and under-studied issues such as: labor force participation and intermeditation, career choices and opportunities, the situation of youth in rural areas, use of free time and of recreational and educational services complementary to formal education. Econometric analysis will highlight the relationship between various dimensions of exclusions and household backgrounds, essential for the optimization of targeting and outreach strategies. Focus groups, interviews and life-accounts of young people in different geographic locations (but focused on the same themes explored in the quantitative survey) will provide more in-depth information on the causes of exclusion and positive strategies to enhance inclusion. On the supply-side, the study will examine the targeting and outreach of youth-oriented services and the extent to which these respond to observed needs.

Overall expected outcomes include: (i) stronger synergies among the Ministry of Social Development, Entraide Nationale7, the Agence de Developpement Social, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Agriculture, and INDH8 on youth-oriented programs, as well as the Ministry of Finance for pro-youth expenditure tracking; (ii) recommendations for improved targeting, outreach and performance of existing programs for disadvantaged youth; (iii) increased social and economic inclusion of young beneficiaries through possible World-Bank financed assistance such as:

- Upgrading and expansion of infrastructure for youth services and for youth with special needs (i.e. Maisons des Jeunes, Etablissements de Protection Sociale, rural facilities, etc);
- Improved delivery standards for integrated youth friendly services at community level with direct youth to youth engagement (i.e. IT and language, healthy lifestyles, life skills, community projects);
- Support to Income generation activities (i.e. employability trainings, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, green jobs training);
- Capacity building for implementation of national and local youth policy with youth participation.

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7 For more see www.traide.ma
8 French acronym for the National Initiative for Human Development – for more on this Bank project see Morocco page at www.worldbank.org - the TTL is Mohamed Medouar.