



## Quarterly Progress Report

### OMEP Regional Partnership for Culture and Development (RPCD) Program

**Cooperative Agreement Number 263-A-00-10-00052-00**

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The OMEP Regional Partnership for Culture and Development Program (RPCDP) was awarded as a cooperative agreement to FHI 360 on September 22, 2010. This is the 3rd quarterly report and covers the period from May 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

The purpose of the Program is to “support the dissemination of regional research on development issues, share best practices and lessons learned from international development programs, and provide a forum for knowledge sharing and intellectual innovation.”

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## **Overview of Developments**

The work this quarter was related to a 5 Point Plan, and this directed the focus of efforts over the next quarter.

The RPCD Program made progress on a number of fronts during this period, most significantly the Partnership Forum, working with USAID Mission staff to gather input on their research needs, and creating an online research request page submission form for Mission staff, and locating available short-term technical assistance to assist in answering research questions. Travel to the region for the purpose of meeting with potential Partnership Forum members took place in June with trips to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco.

Organizationally, it was announced in June that AED assets would be acquired by Family Health International (FHI). Once the assets were acquired, USAID would novate agreements from AED to FHI. The new organization is FHI Development 360 LLC (FHI 360).

## **Travel to the Region**

In order to work on the Partnership Forum, travel to the region was approved for Mr. Nicholas Wedeman to Jordan and Lebanon. Ms. Mariam Hanna, the Operations and Communications manager who has been working on Partnership Forum screening, also travelled to Jordan to work with Mr. Wedeman.

Dr. Christina Blumel travelled to Cairo, Egypt and then to Morocco to work on the Partnership Forum. During the course of her travel she met with the Egypt Mission program office staff to gather Mission input for the program research agenda for the grants Program, with local staff, and with AOTR Dr. Adly Hassanein from the OMEP office. She was accompanied in these meetings by Ms. Hanna.

## **Partnership Forum**

### **Approval of the criteria**

The criteria used to screen organizations as potential Partnership Forum members was finalized and approved taking into account feedback after review from OMEP. To finalize the criteria, the team took the illustrative criteria from the Proposal, and created

definitions, a scoring matrix and a detailed review of each criteria. In addition, the Team discussed how to make an assessment, and potential questions and issues that might come up in the course of working on the Partnership Forum.

The criteria were initially used to screen several Egyptian institutions, in order to investigate how much information was available online, and to ensure that there were full and robust definitions of the criteria and that they could be used to effectively assess institutions. The resulting draft of the criteria was then submitted to the AOTR for review and approval by June.

Initial OMEP feedback resulted in a revision of the criteria. The revision included ensuring that the criteria were not too restrictive, and to ensure that potential members would be from a broad range of institutional types and did not exclude smaller organizations with less ability to share research. The final version of the criteria addressed these issues and was approved in May.

### **How we increased the number of potential partners on the list**

The initial list of potential members was compiled from suggestions from OMEP, as well as those suggested in the original technical proposal. Mr. Jason Kelleher and Ms. Amy West used their networks of contacts to get suggestions of organizations that could be added to the list, in addition to those already identified by OMEP. Information based on the approved description of the Program was provided and a combination of emails and phone contacts went forward. In addition, both individuals used the Internet to find possibilities that could be further explored. For Morocco, Dr. Blumel used personal contacts to help in identifying potential Partnership Forum members, and used email and phone calls.

### **Refining the Lists**

Using her network in Jordan and Lebanon, Amy West asked local contacts to list top university departments with a reputation in one or multiple priority sector areas and then add to this list the think-tanks that they knew by reputation in Lebanon and Jordan. This was then cross-referenced with the existing the initial lists to provide a robust selection of choices.

The list for Egypt was also checked by Dr. Daniel Siskin, who has completed doctoral work in Egypt, and who is currently on staff with FHI 360. These organizations will be the focus of additional meetings and screening.

In Morocco, in addition to Dr. Blumel's outreach to personal contacts, one meeting took place with an international NGO to get background on the research environment in Morocco. Meetings with local FHI 360 staff also resulted in a final list of recommended and prioritized organizations, that will be vetted and then contacted during a follow up trip and/or by the new country coordinator.

All of the organizations were checked in the two databases that list terrorist suspects before any initial meeting took place. In addition, organizations were informally screened through trusted local contacts in the region.

### **Contacting potential partners**

Local contacts in Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco assisted with an introduction. This outreach effort included emails with a description of the Program and an introduction. Contact was made directly by the Program Manager or by the person who would be involved in the meeting to set a day and time. In Egypt, this was done by Ms. Hanna and Dr. Blumel. In Lebanon and Jordan, this was done by Ms. West and Mr. Wedeman. In Egypt, the Program Director followed up with an email to inquire about appointment times. Not all potential partners contacted were available for a meeting. In some cases, there was no response. In these cases, phone contact was also made to follow up and set a time and day.

Some contacts were with non-traditional choices for Partnership Forum membership, yet an important source of information to discuss the status of research networks in the country. In Cairo, Ms. Hanna and Dr. Blumel met with the Ford Foundation which works extensively on supporting research in the region, to benefit from their input. This was also true in Morocco, where Dr. Blumel met with the local NDI office knowledgeable about the NGO community.

### **Initial vetting of partners**

In Egypt, information from the organization website was used to make assessments according to the criteria. Follow up meetings were set to introduce the program, to collect any annual reports or prospectuses, and to gauge whether the organization would be interested in further contact. This opened the door for follow up with further questions.

In Lebanon and Jordan, due to time constraints, only initial terrorism database screening was completed prior to meetings. However, informal review by trusted local contacts was also provided to ensure that organizations were well respected.

In both cases, interviews were open ended, with the ultimate goal of understanding what type of research the organization engaged in (primary and/or policy related, and any special focus of the organization, and who is the audience for the research) as well as the level of interest in being part of the Partnership Forum.

## **Moving forward with meetings**

Two different approaches were used to identify and make contact with potential Partnership Forum members. The following is a synopsis of the process and lessons learned to date from the work accomplished so far.

- In Egypt, Dr. Blumel and Ms. Hanna met with 6 organizations in Cairo, Egypt.
- In Morocco, Dr. Blumel met with 3 organizations (during a two day stay) in Rabat and Casablanca.
- In Jordan, Mr. Wedeman and Ms. Hanna met with 8 organizations in Amman.
- In Lebanon, Mr. Wedeman met with 11 organizations in both Beirut and Tripoli.

## **Lessons learned**

The initial interviews and contacts with organizations have provided important insights into how best to move forward with the contact and vetting process, as well as with issues that will need to be addressed in working with potential members and in building the Forum network. These are detailed below.

- Meeting with the head of the organization is crucial for two reasons. First, in many cases the organizations are “top down” in management style and approach. Therefore, getting the approval of the director or other highly placed individuals is very helpful going forward. Second, the head of the organization is often able to speak more directly and inquire directly about the issue of how the Partnership Forum will benefit their organization.
- Meeting with the organization brings more information that is not available online. In several meetings in Egypt, annual reports and descriptive material was provided that was not available on line. Organizations may have a limited ability to post this information on line and websites may also have incomplete and outdated information.
- Informal vetting that checks on the reputation of the organization using local contacts is very helpful.
- The vetting process needs to be threefold, involving meeting with representatives of the organization, doing a more complete vetting using available information to make assessments using the criteria, and then further follow up with the organization for additional clarification and provision of information.

- If meetings with organizations happen before using online info to make an assessment, this often will provide a good sense of whether to pursue involvement. Also, interest by the organization in participation can be gauged as well. However, doing an initial assessment using online sources can provide clear direction related to things that need to be clarified and lead to specific questions. In both cases, however, follow up will be needed.
- The next step is to complete screening using the criteria, given the information provided during meetings and provision of annual reports and other material. Follow up will be needed where there are gaps in information.
- Country coordinators once hired will be immediately tasked with screening Partnership Forum members, so that an initial group can be invited and the Forum can be formally launched.

### **Portal and digital library**

During this period, the Portal Team was able to create and enable a research request page, to answer the needs of Mission staff. In addition, the Program located individuals from the Washington D.C. home office who could provide Short Term Technical Assistance, as well as a pool of potential consultants that could also be contracted with to provide additional research support.

The Research Request page was reviewed with OMEP staff (Dr. Adly Hassanein, Ms. Amira Taha, Ms. Manal Eid and Mr. Refaat Shafeek). Their feedback was taken incorporated into the final version of the page.

Using a list of Program officers provided by Ms. Kim Delaney, logins and passwords were created for users. These were distributed to them via email with an explanation of the service, a detailed explanation of how to change and personalize passwords, and a frequently asked questions page for initial users.

The work of the Portal team ensured that the page was ready in time for the Mission Director's meeting in Morocco in May where it was announced as part of the OMEP presentation.

The Program has been able to produce three research responses to date, two were discussed during contacts with Mission staff related to gathering input for the research agenda. The third was submitted by Ms. Taha and Ms. Eid with the OMEP office.

In addition, work on the digital library continued. Documents from a library compiled by Dr. Adly Hassanein are in the process of being tagged and uploaded. A list of descriptor terms had previously been developed and reviewed by area experts at FHI 360 in the areas of youth and democracy and governance. A third list concerning natural resource management, with particular attention to water-related terms, is waiting for review by a third area expert. Also developed was an electronic form to gather information on each document. This will be used initially by Program staff, but can be made available to non-Program staff as well.

Drafts of the use policy have also been developed as well as the document collection policy. However, these need to be submitted for AOTR review, in addition to the statement on how the Program will address copyright issues for documents.

In addition to these developments, the team worked on reviewing the different webinar platforms under consideration. These were also reviewed by Ms. Iman Choucri and Ms. Hanna while Dr. Blumel was in Cairo. The Program home office staff in Cairo needs to be comfortable with the platform, and also any platform needs to work well in the regional context.

This initial review and assessment (involving criteria such as ease of use, level of training offered, ability to use Arabic content, and ease of connectivity) resulted in two candidates were or further investigation and testing. The next step (to be taken in July) was to involve other AED offices in the region in a webinar using trial versions of the software. This would enable the Program to make judgments about coverage and ease of use, as local FSN employees would be participating in trials.

## **Research Agenda**

Work also went forward in May and June to contact Mission Program officers to collect their input on needed research. The purpose was to assist in compiling a priority set of questions for the Program research agenda, particularly as it relates to the grants program.

An initial email was sent by Ms. Delaney to Program officers in the Missions resulted in responses from all Missions except West Bank/Gaza. Despite follow up with this Mission, there has been no response to date.

Dr. Blumel sent a list of questions and topics that had already been collected by OMEP, but which needed to be reviewed to make sure that they were still salient in the region. In addition, program officers were asked to add additional questions or topics that had not been identified previously, or to provide comment on any topics/questions.

Conversations with Program officers went forward as requested with the following Missions: USAID/Yemen, USAID/Jordan, USAID/Lebanon and USAID/Morocco. Detailed email input was received from USAID/Iraq. Two rounds of meetings were held with USAID/Egypt program officers as well. Other conversations were by phone.

The Program is in the process of looking at the results to date, to narrow down the list and present a set of questions that have been revealed to be of common importance in each of the three issues areas. The Program will ask for Dr. Hassanein's support to follow up again with Missions with a much smaller list of questions. At this point, a description of the grants program should also be provided to Mission staff. The effort should be in advance of a kick off meeting with OMEP staff as well to provide information for review and further refinement at this time. Also, this information will guide the Research, Communications and Training Plan for the Program. It is also noted that all topics and questions need USAID input and approval.

## **Grants Program**

Further work needs to be done in relation to the grants program. Two draft grants manuals have been identified to be customized for Program needs. In addition, work on the Partnership Forum and meetings with local organizations have revealed the need for a strategy to attract grant proposals from organizations that highlight the action research that USAID requires. Mr. Wedeman will be working on this aspect of the Program from the home office to ensure continued forward momentum while the Program is engaged in start up.

A review of regulations that would specifically affect the Program and concerning program management also need to be addressed by the Program Contracts Officer at FHI 360. It is anticipated that home office support will be provided to the Program Finance Manager Iman Choucri in relation to the grants program. However, she has attended in June USAID sponsored training that reviewed current USAID regulations in relation to finance, and which also had a section on grants regulations. This will help greatly in going forward with this aspect of the Program smoothly, once the research agenda has been set and approved.

## **July to September Project Activities**

With the novation in July of agreements to FHI 360, the Program will be able to start full implementation. The focus will be on hiring staff quickly in Cairo as well as all of the country

coordinators. The highest priority will be the addition of a Chief of Party. Given the difficulty in locating a suitable Egyptian candidate, as part of a budget re-alignment for the Program the request will be made to pay differentials and allowances, if a non-Egyptian candidate is identified. In the interim, a seasoned individual with CoP experience will be identified and brought to Cairo to assist with operational start up and begin the transitioning of the Program from the Washington D.C. home office to the field. Operational start up will also include finding office space, purchasing equipment and arranging a kick off meeting with OMEP and other staff.

Despite intensive start up activity, the home office staff will also be working on Partnership Forum related activities including developing criteria for non-local participants, working on finalizing the grants manual and developing a work plan for the grants program, working on the Portal for USAID review and launch, and moving forward with the research agenda for OMEP review and approval.