

Under the Patronage of
Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah

Youth@Work
PARTNERSHIPS FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

شباب في العمل
شراكات لتنمية المهارات

CONFERENCE REPORT

Amman, Jordan
February 21–23, 2012



Executive Summary

More than 400 representatives of companies, ministries, municipalities, and civil society organizations from 15 countries across the MENA region attended the “Youth@Work: Partnerships for Skills Development” conference in Amman, Jordan on February 21-23, 2012. Convened by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), the event engaged critical stakeholders who are supporting employability programs benefiting the region’s youth. The conference was part of a series of learning events supported by the World Bank’s Global Partnership for Youth Employability (GPYE). Additional sponsors included The MasterCard Foundation and the USAID-supported Youth:Work program, a global public-private partnership to promote employment and entrepreneurship for youth worldwide.

The conference was held under the Patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah, who attended the opening ceremony, along with ministers, mayors and municipal officials, and other dignitaries from Jordan and around the region. Major donors and foundations from the region and elsewhere were also represented, including the World Bank, the U.S. State Department, USAID, The MasterCard Foundation, AGFUND, Silatech, Microsoft, Hilton, the ILO, and the “e4e” Initiative of the IFC and the Islamic Development Bank.

The Youth@Work conference focused on issues related to youth employment training and skills development. Highlights from the sessions included:

- An overview of regional trends by the World Bank and Arab League, moderated by the Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs
- A discussion of the role of municipalities in supporting youth employment programs, with six different Arab cities and towns represented
- Highly participatory breakout sessions on the development of effective youth employment programs in areas such as conducting youth assessments, building employer demand-driven training programs, mapping cross-sectoral stakeholders to support youth employment, teaching life skills, supporting community service to build employment skills, and working with at-risk youth
- A half-day workshop session on the evaluation of youth employment programs, during which a new Monitoring & Evaluation Guide created by the World Bank and GPYE partners was presented (available online at <http://www.gpye.org/measuring-success-youth-livelihood-interventions>)
- A plenary session on strategies for building multi-sectoral partnerships in support of youth employment
- A final session engaging young social entrepreneurs from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt around how to implement youth employment programs effectively

The event provided a platform for announcing a number of exciting new public-private partnerships being launched by the conference conveners in Jordan. First, the “2,000 Hospitality Jobs Initiative” seeks to create employment for 2,000 Jordanian youth, ages 18-24, in their local communities, through a partnership between IYF, USAID, the Jordanian Federation of Tourism Associations, and the Jordanian Hospitality and Tourism Education Company. Second, the “Career Counseling and Training Center Initiative” aims to establish a network of career counseling centers across Jordan in partnership with the public and private sectors, including Luminus Education, Al Quds College, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Youth, and IYF’s local community-based organization (CBO) partners. Third, the Khadimati Craftsmen Website Initiative, created in partnership with USAID, the

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Group, and the Ministry of Labor, will build an online platform to market the businesses of youth entrepreneurs.

The high attendance, strong participation, and quality of dialogue contributed to a robust exchange of new ideas, best practices, and lessons learned from across the MENA region and beyond. Key findings and topics of discussion included:

- Stakeholders from across all sectors – municipal and national government, private sector, and civil society organizations – must work together to ensure that youth employment programs are effective, coordinated, and respond to identified needs.
- The private sector, in particular, should be one of the key drivers of the youth skills development agenda in order to ensure that youth training programs are market- and growth-industry-relevant. At the same time, the development community should help private sector stakeholders understand that workforce development is a “bottom-line” issue for companies interested in hiring qualified new employees and expanding their businesses.
- Incorporating life skills training throughout childhood and youth development programs and also alongside technical skills in employability training programs is of critical importance. At the same time, the definition of life skills may be different in each culturally specific context and better metrics should be developed to measure the effectiveness of a given life skills program and clearly articulate the impact of such training on young peoples’ careers and positive community engagement.
- Proper evaluation of programs is necessary in order to learn from experience and gain support for the continuation and scale-up of programs. While the precise nature of evaluation will vary across programs, there is a critical need to build awareness of its importance among organizations in the MENA region.
- Short-term strategies by development practitioners to move ahead on “what we know now” and develop solutions for existing gaps in youth job skills development need to be continually balanced with long-term strategies to invest more in learning, measuring outcomes and impacts, and incorporating these lessons into new programs.
- Youth can and should play an important role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of job skills training programs developed to serve them. Youth engagement in the development process will help to ensure program relevancy and uptake and therefore impact.

The success of the conference and the discussions enabled by its participants demonstrates the growth and importance of youth employment programming in the region. The conference conveners are building on this momentum through a variety of initiatives, including online knowledge-sharing and upcoming regional conferences under the GPYE.

DAY 1: Identifying Effective Practices to Address Regional Youth Unemployment

Plenary Session: Municipal Perspectives on Youth Skills Development

Presenters:

- Franck Bousquet, Sector Manager, Urban and Social Development, MENA, The World Bank
- Nancy Abu Hayanneh, Social Services Department Manager, Greater Amman Municipality

Speakers:

- Mary Morcos, Director of Childhood Department, Cairo Governorate, Egypt
- Nader Ghazal, Mayor of Tripoli, Lebanon
- Abdul Rahman Wald Mahmoud, Deputy Mayor of Nouakchott, Mauritania
- Firas Masri, Member of Aleppo City Council, Syria

Moderator: Ibrahim Al Turki, Executive Director, MENA Child & Youth Initiative, Arab Urban Development Institute

Chair: H.E. Maher H. Abu Elsamem, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Jordan

Discussion Overview:

This session addressed the perspectives of regional mayors on the issue of partnership for youth skills development at the local level. The session included two key speeches by the presenters. The first highlighted the youth bulge in the Arab world, the main challenges facing cities, what cities can do to address these challenges, and how youth can participate at the local level. The second presented the role of the Greater Amman Municipality and its programs to develop youth skills.

The panelists, mayors from around the MENA region, shared their own success stories from Tripoli, Cairo, Aleppo, and Nouakchott, before opening a discussion with participants on the role of municipalities in building partnerships to develop youth skill programs and promote youth employability.

One key example discussed was the strategic plan for youth employment that has been implemented in Al Fayhaa Union of Municipalities (Lebanon) and Aleppo (Syria). A “Social Safety Net” was established with cooperation from the public sector, private sector, and NGOs in order to combat school drop-out and provide a second chance for marginalized youth who cannot return to school by providing vocational training. A youth survey and labor market assessment were conducted in order to design action plans and life skills programs.

Other examples discussed were the various models of partnerships that have been implemented in Cairo to increase youth employment through activities such as creating small enterprises, developing handicrafts skills, and providing youth training. All of these projects were implemented by the Cairo Governorate in partnership with the private sector and NGOs.

Main Outcomes:

- We must enhance the role of municipalities in youth development within national socio-economic strategies and in coordination with central, regional, and local governments.
- Stakeholders must work together to build public-private partnerships to create new job opportunities for youth at the local level.
- A strong approach is to create a “Social Safety Net” to include NGOs, CBOs, municipalities, and chambers of commerce, to coordinate efforts, share experiences and resources, and implement successful youth employment projects.
- Governments should support municipal, vocational training centers for youth training and life skills programs that can help youth to enter the world of work.
- We must build the capacity of municipalities and local stakeholders to design, implement, and evaluate youth programs and projects.

Plenary Session:

Regional Trends and Challenges in Youth Skills Development

Presenters:

- Haneen Sayed, Human Development Coordinator, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, The World Bank
- Mohamed Al Twaijri, Assistant Secretary General for Economic Affairs, League of Arab States

Moderator: H.E. Wael Abou Faour, Minister of Social Affairs, Lebanon

Discussion Overview:

This session highlighted regional data, issues, and trends in youth workforce development and employment-related skills acquisition. The presentations focused on evidence pointing to specific skills development challenges in the region and described some of the interventions necessary to address these challenges.

Ms. Sayed characterized the main economic actors in the MENA region as being divided into two groups: those reaping rewards from the current system (“insiders”) and those who rarely benefit at all (“outsiders”). Insiders include individuals working in the formal sector, public sector workers, and adult men, while outsiders generally include youth, women, the unemployed, and informal sector workers. Ms. Sayed points to three main barriers preventing outsiders from becoming insiders: 1) the MENA region’s economies do not encourage dynamism, turnover, or new business development because they thrive on privilege and low competition and therefore reward those who have been in business for a long time over new entrepreneurs; 2) the institutional framework of many of the region’s countries – antiquated labor laws, lack of public sector reform, inadequate public education systems, and the current social insurance design – prevents youth and the poor from building market-relevant skills and competencies; and 3) those with irrelevant or inadequate skills often have difficulty accessing the kind of education and training that would help make them attractive hires. Unfortunately, when they do learn these skills, they still face difficulties in being hired because of the nepotism that informally dictates hiring decisions across much of the region.

In terms of tipping the balance in favor of the region’s outsiders, Ms. Sayed argued that the following long-term changes should be instituted: reform of labor law regulations and the public sector, strengthening of education quality, promotion of innovation, development of the knowledge economy, and improvement of the region’s investment climate. At the same time, in the near term, Ms. Sayed called for greater dialogue with non-traditional social actors such as the NGO community (on monitoring effectiveness of labor market programs) and the private sector (in driving the skills development agenda). She also called for the development of programs that will help governments to realize early, credible gains that do not compromise medium- and long-term solutions, such as temporary jobs for excluded workers (e.g., short-term jobs in public works programs, community service, etc.) and expansion of new sources of employment through entrepreneurship development, micro-financing, and the like. Finally, Ms. Sayed argued that the region should invest in access to information and data in order to benchmark and evaluate skills systems and establish certification systems that encourage the hiring of outsiders.

Mohamed Al Twajiri also placed a high value on accurate information and data and stated that unemployment issues in the Arab world cannot be addressed without access to accurate statistics about unemployment, economic growth rates, youth and women’s engagement in the economy, and other crucial issues. Unfortunately, such statistics are not always readily available in the MENA region and when they are, they are not published in a timely enough manner for key stakeholders to act on them effectively. That said, one key statistic that many in the development sector are aware of is the MENA region’s high youth unemployment rate. One of the main reasons for this high rate, Mr. Twajiri suggested, is the absence of true economic growth in the region that all parties (the poor as well as the middle class and wealthy) benefit from and that actually creates jobs. In order to spur true economic growth, Mr. Tawajiri argued, the region’s countries should place a much greater focus on small- and medium-sized business development and the teaching of entrepreneurship in the education system.

Main Outcomes:

- More accurate statistics about unemployment, economic growth, etc. will help stakeholders to better address the issue of youth employment and skills development.
- In the short term, governments must use a variety of mechanisms to create jobs for youth, women, and other disadvantaged groups that are currently excluded from the labor market.
- In the long term, a variety of solutions must be implemented by the public, private, and NGO sectors, including: emphasizing entrepreneurship and small business development, reforming labor laws and other regulations, promoting innovation and reforming educational systems, and spurring economic growth to incorporate “outsiders” into the labor market.

Official Welcoming and Opening Remarks

Speakers:

- Abdul Haleem M. R. Kailani, Chairman of Amman Municipal Committee
- William Reese, President and CEO, International Youth Foundation
- Abdullah Al-Subail, Deputy Director General, Arab Urban Development Institute
- Hedi Larbi, Country Director, Middle East Department, The World Bank
- Christopher Crowley, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Middle East, USAID
- Ronan Farrow, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Global Youth Issues
- Deepali Khanna, Youth Learning Director, The MasterCard Foundation

- Manar Bleilat, Youth:Work Jordan Youth Ambassador, Southern Shouneh
- Mohammad Khattari, Youth Work Jordan Youth Ambassador, Irbid

The conference was opened with welcoming remarks from high-level representatives of the Jordanian government and program sponsors, in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah.

Eng. Kailani, speaking on behalf of the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), highlighted the importance of the conference in addressing one of the most pressing issues that impacts all communities at this time and the economic situation in the region. Ever since the Children and Youth Conference that GAM hosted in 2002, the Municipality has been actively involved in children's development, and is glad to be part of continuing this work and showing its commitment to the youth of Jordan. GAM has initiated a variety of social programs that target youth and develop them personally and economically, and seeks to use the energy of youth for the improvement of their communities. He invited youth to participate in the development of their societies, and to become leaders who can take on the responsibility of their country tomorrow.

Mr. Reese stressed that conference dialogues would focus on key themes that are central to the work of the International Youth Foundation (IYF) – the effectiveness, scale, and sustainability of programs supporting youth. He highlighted the work of IYF across the region – in Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco – as well as several concrete initiatives coming out of the conference. First, the “2,000 Hospitality Jobs Initiative” seeks to create employment for 2,000 Jordanian youth, ages 18-24, in their local communities, through a partnership between IYF, USAID, the Jordanian Federation of Tourism Associations, and the Jordanian Hospitality and Tourism Education Company. Second, the “Career Counseling and Training Center Initiative” aims to establish a network of career counseling centers across Jordan in partnership with the public and private sectors, including Luminus Education, Al Quds College, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Youth, and IYF's local community-based organization (CBO) partners. Third, the Khadimati Craftsmen Website Initiative, created in partnership with USAID, the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Group, and the Ministry of Labor, will build an online platform to market the businesses of youth entrepreneurs.

Mr. Al-Subail presented the work of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and its MENA Child and Youth Initiative (MENA CYI), which focuses on upgrading the capacities of local authorities and municipalities throughout the region to improve the wellbeing of children and youth, especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged, and to enhance knowledge of effective policies and programs that address critical issues facing children and youth. He expressed his hope that the conference would identify the challenges that youth face in finding work and the needs of employment programs, and that the conference participants would benefit from the international and local experiences and best practices presented.

Mr. Larbi, speaking on behalf of the World Bank, expressed the Bank's pleasure to be a co-sponsor of the conference and to be involved in building home-grown, partnership-driven solutions that create opportunities for Arab youth. He spoke about a web chat with Arab youth recently hosted by the Bank, in which youth expressed their top priorities as education, skills development, and better employment opportunities. This need is confirmed by the private sector, which reports worker skills and education to be among the top constraints in the business climate. The World Bank looks forward to working together with other development partners to identify best practices to address these challenges and to scale them up.

Mr. Crowley spoke about USAID's commitment to improving lives in the Middle East, explaining how "recent events in the region have offered us the opportunity to adjust our approach to assistance and to reach out beyond traditional development actors and to forge new partnerships across Arab communities. He cited several examples of USAID's work, such as convening an Arab youth civil society conference in Casablanca, Morocco last November; supporting programs in Egypt that address underlying economic and social challenges by scaling up youth job training and skills development; fostering youth social enterprise in Egypt and Lebanon through the Alliance for Social Entrepreneurship; and supporting IYF's Youth:Work Jordan program that has already provided 1,700 youth with employment and 5,000 others with training. He stressed that youth engagement is a priority for USAID at the highest levels of the Agency.

Mr. Farrow highlighted the role of youth as key to the future of Jordan, the MENA region, and the world. He described how the U.S. State Department is in the process of taking a "hard, honest look at all of its activities to ensure that they work for young people and with young people at the table." He spoke of the enormous human capital potential of Jordanian youth that represents an opportunity for the country and the region. At the same time, youth are frustrated by the lack of jobs that meet their needs and desires, as well as their desire for dignity and for making their voices heard in an increasingly globalized world. In response, the State Department seeks to work in partnership and focus its efforts to best meet the needs of this important demographic.

Ms. Khanna described the four themes around which The MasterCard Foundation works to create pathways out of poverty: first, enabling education, especially secondary education and beyond; second, increasing employability skills by listening to what employers need; third, promoting and enabling entrepreneurship; and fourth, working towards the financial inclusion of youth. The goal of this work is "to enable young people to enter the workforce and engage with the economy on their own terms... by collaborating with partners who are at the front lines of innovation and transformation." She highlighted The MasterCard Foundation's work with IYF under the Egypt@Work program, which will provide 10,000 unemployed youth in Egypt with the skills and networks they need for employment or starting their own business.

Providing a youth perspective, two Youth Ambassadors from IYF's Youth:Work Jordan program, Ms. Bleilat and Mr. Khattari, spoke about what they've done through the Youth:Work Jordan program. Ms. Bleilat spoke about how, through the life skills, employability, and volunteering activities she participated in, she and a group of friends began non-formal education classes for their parents, and literacy classes for children in their community, and asked that participants support their initiatives and activities so that they can establish their presence and positive influence in their communities. Mr. Khattari spoke about how, though he had failed his Tawjihi (high school graduation exam) twice in the past, he was able to take his Tawjihi again through the trainings of the Youth:Work Jordan program, pass the exam, and is now in his second year at university studying accounting. Both youth mentioned how they look forward to the support that the conference participants can provide so that every young person has the same opportunities they've had to grow personally and serve their country.

Breakout Sessions

Theme 1:

Building a Strong Foundation for Skills Development Programs: Connecting Youth to Markets and Leveraging Community Assets

Breakout Session A: Assessing Youth Skills Development Needs

Panelists:

- Rachel Awad, Senior Program Manager, Silatech
- Gareth Fox, Vice President of Human Resources, Hilton Worldwide Middle East and Africa
- Rasha Al Mahdi, Head of Policy and Programs, Sudan National Population Council

Moderator: Haya Shubailat, Project Management Specialist, USAID Jordan

Discussion Overview:

This session addressed the failure to involve youth in identifying possible career interests at a young age (13-14 years old), which would allow them to tailor their studies to those interests rather than simply pursuing the subjects where they get high marks, regardless of whether those topics are of interest to them or could eventually lead to employment.

The panelists explained that career guidance should be seen as a long corridor with many doors, with the role of guidance counselors to help the youth explore what is behind each door, rather than pushing them through a limited number of doors due to lack of time, interest, or understanding on the part of the youth. If the youth are actively involved in the process, they can select a career path and identify the steps necessary to reach the target they have set for themselves and thereby be in charge of their future, rather than having their future unfold in front of them as they go.

The perception of vocational training as a place for failed students pushes many away from vocational studies, despite the availability of jobs in those specializations. In many cases, there is a drastic shortage of manpower in some technical jobs, while the unemployment rate among youth is particularly high. The lack of correspondence between the educational options offered to youth, the actual job demand, and the areas of interest among youth lead to a mismatch, resulting in high unemployment together with a shortage of manpower and the importation of foreign labor.

Main Outcomes:

- Career counseling materials should be developed for students as early as middle school, to ensure that they start early in envisioning their futures. These counseling materials should encourage youth to continue investigating and re-assessing their chosen career paths, manage the expectations of parents, and present entrepreneurship as a viable option for some.
- Stakeholders should promote vocational training and technical jobs as a viable and acceptable path, rather than the studies one would follow if everything else failed.
- The transition from a classical secondary to technical/vocational secondary school system should be facilitated by highlighting the highest possible level of achievement in such studies

- together with the corresponding jobs, as well as the current and future demand for such qualifications.
- Entrepreneurship should also be promoted as a viable option, and parents should be involved in exposure to entrepreneurship opportunities and challenges.

**Breakout Session B:
Building “Demand-Driven” Training Approaches**

Panelists:

- Mayyada Abu-Jaber, Director, Jordan Career Education Foundation
- Waleed Al Banawi, Vice Chairman, Banawi Industrial Group and Co-Founder and Chairman, Jisr, Saudi Arabia
- Ikram Makni, Director, Sfax Business Development Center, Tunisia

Moderator: Mohammad AlMbaid, Palestine Country Director, International Youth Foundation

Discussion Overview:

Participants in the discussion agreed that the education system in the MENA region does not produce youth who are able to make the necessary transition from school to work and gain meaningful employment opportunities. It was also agreed that while different organizations are already addressing youth unemployment challenges, more effort is needed to develop sustainable and scalable programs that start from pre-school all the way to post-graduate education and on-the-job training.

The discussion also reflected ample understanding of the complexity of the tasks and multiplicity of stakeholders that need to be involved and partnerships that must be formed in order to start addressing youth employability challenges in the region. Youth development practitioners, technical and vocational training agencies, and the private sector must work together to assess labor market needs and develop training programs directly relevant to these needs.

Main Outcomes:

- We must define the necessary set of soft skills and competencies that youth should be equipped with to transition to the world of work.
- Cultural norms – including a “culture of shame” among youth and parents regarding low-level jobs, as well as real or perceived nepotism, corruption, and *wasta* (“connections”) – should be addressed by new youth employability programs.
- The Tawjihi high school matriculation system is inappropriate for today’s work environment as it does not encourage creative and analytical thinking among youth. Instead, it reinforces memorization and lack of creativity, and hence should be reformed.
- The private sector should be more and better involved in the design and implementation of any successful youth employability skills programs. Workforce readiness should be viewed as a bottom-line issue for companies that want to hire and expand their business.
- Business-led schools were discussed as one option for involving the private sector in addressing the challenge by creating public-private partnership to take-over struggling schools to yield higher-quality student outcomes.

- Governments should play a role by introducing soft skills as an integral part of the education system to facilitate work readiness.
- There must be better coordination and sharing of information among public, private, and NGO actors about sectors with high growth potential. This information must be communicated to youth so that they can orient themselves in the right direction.

**Breakout Session C:
Identifying Community Assets to Support and Sustain Quality Youth Skills Development Programming**

Panelists:

- Samar Dudin, Regional Director and Head of Programs, Ruwwad Al Tanmeya, Jordan
- Jackie Kameel, Managing Director, Nahdet El Mahrousa, Egypt
- Aiman Soltan Tamimi, Vice President for Community Services, Palestine Polytechnic University
- Nadia Touihri, Vice Director of Statistics and Social Studies, Central Direction of Demographic and Social Statistics, National Institute of Statistics, Tunisia

Moderator: Nader Ghazal, Mayor of Tripoli, Lebanon

Discussion Overview:

During this session, the panelists shared their experiences conducting Rapid Community Appraisals (RCAs), identifying resources, and engaging partners from all sectors. They discussed the challenges they have encountered in these processes and the advantages that partnerships have brought to their work, as well as tips for the participants of the conference when conducting their own assessments.

The panelists stressed that even when resources are not abundant, it is important to see local relationships as resources to build upon in a community. Communities are often strong and solutions can be community-driven by helping make members, including youth, activists. Likewise, solutions are more enduring when they are authentic, locally rooted, and build reciprocity in the process. During the design phase of an RCA, it is worthwhile to invest in interviewing local community members on the design of the research tools; doing this builds local buy-in for the study and ensures that it will be comprehensive in its design.

In addition to community and youth involvement, many of the panelists also highlighted the need to create links between the public and private sectors. Several panelists discussed how partnerships with the public sector helped them to gain access to resources, like universities and schools, to deliver technical and life skills trainings. These partnerships with the public sector led to improved scaling-up of their programs as well as sustainability through sharing of resources. Private sector partnerships have also benefited the programs by making them more practical, especially in terms of financial resources that youth can access and by helping training programs become more relevant to current private-sector needs. An emphasis on partnerships in general has led to innovations in effective programming, from grassroots and youth input, as well as from private sector perspectives and systems.

Main Outcomes:

- It is important to build upon existing community resources and assets to help ground initiatives in the local community, improve cost efficiency, and improve the sustainability of programs.
- Partnerships among civil society organizations, public institutions, and the private sector are effective in increasing sustainability, reach, and innovation.
- There is a need to work on changing the attitude of the private sector toward development programs and to shift the conception of the private sector from CSR toward a bigger developmental view. This approach will amplify the investment and involvement of the private sector as a partner and improve the outcomes of development efforts nationally.
- When mapping local assets, it is crucial to evaluate how the community and youth perceive community resources, and whether the resources are youth-friendly.
- Youth must be part of the assessment work to obtain a real picture of their needs and circumstances.
- We should work with youth using a “rights-based” approach – i.e., educating youth on their rights and responsibilities as a starting point in any intervention involving them. This will build youth’s self-confidence and the confidence of other stakeholders in youth.
- Creating youth-friendly spaces where youth will come and can express themselves is key for true youth participation.

**Theme 2:
Designing Effective Skills Development Interventions**

**Breakout Session D:
Service Learning Approaches:
Engaging Youth in Community Service to Build Job Skills**

Panelists:

- Rana Al Turk, Jordan Country Director, International Youth Foundation
- Leen Abdel Jaber, Executive Director, Injaz Algeria
- Farah Hammoud, Educational and Social Counselor, Ministry of Social Affairs, Lebanon
- Suzie Sayegh, Program Manager, Sharek Youth Forum, Palestine

Moderator: Elie El Kai, Program Manager, MENA Child & Youth Initiative, Arab Urban Development Institute

Discussion Overview:

Discussions during this session centered around the advantages for youth of participating in volunteer and service learning projects, as well as the challenges of encouraging this participation. Youth who participate in high-quality, community-based service-learning programs are likely to benefit in a number of ways, including: gaining access to a range of supports and opportunities to become healthy, caring, and responsible members of their community; increasing their sense of empowerment as youth learn that they can impact real social challenges and needs in their

communities; improving their problem-solving skills, ability to work in teams, and planning abilities; and enhancing their attitudes regarding civic engagement and community involvement. All of these outcomes have the added result of higher academic achievement and an interest in furthering their education. Many leaders in public service today speak about how they were nurtured, inspired, and shaped through their early experiences in community service or volunteering. Young people are more likely to stay engaged when they feel their participation is meaningful and they can make useful contributions through service and social action. Volunteerism encourages lifelong civic participation, instilling in individuals the importance of being a part of their community and in taking direct responsibility for its evolution and development.

However, there are many challenges that keep youth, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, from participating in volunteering and service learning. These challenges include a lack of resources, opportunities, and planning for programs in the community. An additional barrier is a lack of income for youth who are participating in these programs, and the related “culture of shame” that sees such activities as not being worthwhile. Young people as a result may lack motivation or interest in volunteerism.

Many factors may motivate youth to participate in volunteering programs, and it is important to be aware of these motivations in order to attract widespread participation. In addition to altruistic motives such as a concern for the well-being of others and a desire to contribute to the local community, youth may also be motivated by personal benefit. Some of the benefits of participating in volunteering or service learning programs might include developing existing skills or gaining new skills (problem-solving, communication, teamwork, project management, M&E, etc.), gaining work experience in a new environment, learning about personal capabilities and gaining self-confidence, developing networking skills and meeting new contacts, gaining insight into a particular professional sector, and building work experience to be included on a CV for future job applications. Youth may even have the opportunity to participate in vocational training that could lead to a recognized qualification as a part of a service learning project. In sum, service learning allows youth to see themselves as active contributors to their community rather than as passive recipients of decisions made by adults. By taking charge and being recognized for their contributions, they are not only investing in their community but in themselves as well.

Main Outcomes:

- A broad range of stakeholders must be engaged in order to successfully integrate service learning approaches into educational and training programs – particularly the private sector, government ministries, parents, and youth leaders. Service learning can be an effective tool for human resources development.
- Civil society organizations can be active in encouraging service learning by piloting innovative approaches, documenting and disseminating success stories, providing educational institutions with tools and best practices.
- We should work with Ministries of Education to create Service Learning Centers in educational institutions. Service learning should be encouraged and implemented in the academic system in order to instill in youth the importance of volunteerism, responsibility, and civic participation at an early age.

**Breakout Session E:
Maximizing Chances for Youth Employment:
Designing Effective Life Skills Programs**

Life skills lesson facilitators: Mays Shabakaneh and Sana'a Al Tal, Youth:Work Jordan Life Skills Trainers

Presenter: Mara Kronenfeld, Program Manager, Middle East Programs, International Youth Foundation

Panelists:

- Douja Gharbi, Vice-President, Confédération des Entreprises Citoyennes de Tunisie (CONNECT)
- Ghada Khalifa, Citizenship Lead and Community Affairs Manager, Microsoft Egypt
- Valentina Qussisiya, Director General, Jordan River Foundation
- Ilham Zhiri, Founding President, Moroccan Women Mentoring

Moderator: Mays Shabakaneh, Life Skills Specialist, Youth:Work Jordan

Discussion Overview:

This session discussed the growing need to formalize the integration of soft skills or life skills training into youth employment programs. To help introduce conference participants to life skills content and teaching methodologies, two life skills master trainers from the Youth:Work Jordan program demonstrated a mock life skills lesson engaging participants on the topic of how to conduct an interview. By becoming “students” in a life skills lesson, the participants experienced the importance of interactive role-playing and other experiential learning techniques in teaching key life skills topics effectively.

Following the mock lesson, a presentation of IYF’s regional survey of life skills providers highlighted the important role that these providers play across the region to equip young people with the problem-solving, teamwork, and time and project management skills needed to achieve success in the workplace. The study findings emphasized the need for more capacity building to strengthen the quality of existing life skills programs, particularly in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, and coaching and follow-up support for trainers.

Both the study and the mock lesson stimulated a lively discussion on where life skills training programs are going and areas to prioritize. Session panelists highlighted the need for soft skills training for entrepreneurs in order to maximize their capacities and increase employment opportunities with their projects. Internships were also discussed as critical avenues for youth to practice life skills before obtaining a full-time job. Participants talked about the need to engage governments to help sustain life skills in the long term and to help institutionalize life skills into schools and universities. Other major topics discussed included the importance of giving parents life skills training to complement the life skills being learned by their children so they can better support them through adolescence; the need to integrate life skills training with psycho-social support systems, and the need to adjust life skills training programs for the particular social-cultural characteristics of each community (e.g., female-only classes in more traditional community settings).

Main Outcomes:

- Stakeholders should work together to institutionalize life skills in a variety of settings, including in schools, universities, vocational training programs, entrepreneurship programs, and informal education programs.
- Families must be involved in helping young people to acquire life skills.
- Life skills programs must be tailored to the local cultural context and community needs.

**Breakout Session F:
Designing Skills Development Programs that Address the Unique Challenges of At-Risk Youth**

Panelists:

- Somaya Al Alfy, General Director, General Administration for Development and Gender, National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, Egypt
- Alemayehu Konde Koira, Youth Learning Program Manager, The MasterCard Foundation
- Bassam Kort, Deputy Director for Education and Youth Programs, USAID West Bank/Gaza
- Suhad Jabi Masri, Psychosocial Program Manager, Tomorrow's Youth Organization, Palestine

Moderator: Elie Mekhael, Secretary General, Higher Council for Childhood, Ministry of Social Affairs, Lebanon

Discussion Overview:

This session presented a variety of perspectives regarding the definition of at-risk youth and how to serve them. How one defines at-risk youth can vary depending on the context and location. In general, at-risk youth can be understood as being early school-leavers, involved in risky or illegal activities, or affected by violence or conflict or other trauma. For example, young people in Palestine live in conditions that result in insecurity and a sometimes violent environment. The MasterCard Foundation focuses on out-of-school youth since they are often under-served by government and educational institutions and face challenges with transitioning to the world of work. In Egypt, economic challenges contribute to the difficulties that at-risk youth face. Often at-risk youth are especially lacking in essential life skills that are key to livelihood success.

A common theme in the session was the importance of a multi-faceted approach that brings to bear the resources of a variety of sectors – public, private, and community organizations. There was consensus that it is critical to empower and engage parents to play a more effective and supportive role for young people who are at-risk. In terms of connecting these youth to the job market, it is critical to ensure they are supported in developing critical life skills as well as technical skills that are market-relevant. Mentorship for at-risk youth is especially important since these youth face additional barriers due to prejudices and reluctance of employers – or the community in general – to give them an opportunity to succeed.

Main Outcomes:

- Addressing the needs of at-risk youth requires a multi-faceted approach by the community at large.
- Psychological needs have to be identified early to be able to intervene successfully.
- It is critical to involve families in the provision of services to at-risk youth to ensure full support.
- At-risk youth need more individualized and multi-faceted attention to overcome the additional hurdles they face.
- Stakeholders must join forces to influence governments to put more resources behind services for at-risk youth.

DAY 2: Evaluating Effectiveness and Scaling Successful Programs through Strategic Partnerships

Plenary Session:

What Do We Know? And What Don't We Know? Setting the Learning Agenda Going Forward

Respondents:

- Deepali Khanna, Youth Learning Director, The MasterCard Foundation
- Mattias Lundberg, Senior Economist, Social Protection & Labor, The World Bank
- Osman Nour, Consultant, MENA Child & Youth Initiative, Arab Urban Development Institute
- Beth Paige, Mission Director, USAID Jordan
- Ibrahim Al-Safadi, Deputy Chairman and CEO, Luminus Group, Jordan

Moderator: Awais Sufi, Vice President for Programs, International Youth Foundation

Discussion Overview:

The objective of this session was to “check in” with practitioners and major donors who have been devoting efforts to supporting effective youth employability programming. This was achieved by gathering feedback from conference participants around three questions: 1) What are knowledge areas where there has already been enough research, tool development, and best practice guidance? 2) What knowledge gaps exist related to youth skills job development (e.g., areas where there has not been enough research, tool development, or best practice guidance?) 3) What are concrete tools, research studies, or impact evaluations that you would like donors to focus their resources on going forward?

Despite diverse feedback, there was consensus among participants on several areas where knowledge is already present. The first is that unemployment is a real and significant issue. The second is that education needs to be more demand-driven and respond to the needs of the labor market. The third is that basic cross-cutting skills are important, particularly English and ICT skills. (The role of life skills as a cross-cutting skill is a bit more complex and is discussed in further detail below.) The fourth is an agreement that youth participation in governance is extremely important, although there continues to be a lack of understanding on how this can be concretely implemented.

The panelists discussed the issue of evaluation and whether more research is needed before programs can be successfully implemented. The consensus was that “the need of the hour is to act now” – stakeholders must balance the need to move ahead and actually address problems with the need to always learn more, to refine their programs, and to adapt to ever-changing environments and changing needs of youth. Short-term strategies to move ahead on what we know now can be balanced with long-term strategies to invest more in learning, measuring outcomes and impacts, and incorporating these lessons into new programs. Assessments and evaluations must take into account not only the needs of youth but also the needs of the labor market and the root causes of unemployment and economic stagnation. Some knowledge on these issues is already available, such as the Rapid Community Assessments (RCAs) conducted in Aleppo, Tunis, and Jordan by IYF and

AUDI, but there are still many gaps to be filled in to create successful programs at the local, municipal level.

With regards to knowledge gaps, a key issue was how to define life skills or soft skills, and how to measure their impact on youth outcomes. The panelists agreed on the critical importance of life skills being incorporated throughout childhood and youth development programs and also alongside technical skills in employability training programs. Often, employers are willing to invest in technical training for their employees to accomplish specific tasks, but are less willing to invest in soft skills that their employees will take with them when they move on to another company. In order to move forward, an inventory of existing life skills programs is needed to provide more information on what exactly “life skills” means in a culturally-specific context. Relatedly, there is a need to better understand the value of service learning as a practical, hands-on application of life skills. The panelists agreed that volunteerism and service learning are powerful tools for providing disadvantaged youth with the tools to gain employment, but that the quality of these programs is an important factor in their success.

The panelists also discussed the question of how donors, NGOs, government, and other stakeholders can provide incentives for employers to create environments that are more youth-friendly and to “take a chance” on hiring inexperienced youth. Asking employers to take on young people who do not have a work history, industry-specific skills, and a proven track record of success can be a big risk – external stakeholders may need to subsidize the wages of a young person to encourage employers to take this decision. This action may have other economic side effects and is a trade-off that needs to be considered carefully. Instead of providing financial incentives, it is also possible to emphasize the positive effects of involving young people in the workplace – for example, tapping into their high energy, enthusiasm, flexibility, and understanding of new technology and social media. Another barrier to unemployment for youth is the prevalence of nepotism, foreign labor, and restrictive labor laws. These issues need to be considered carefully when reforming the legal framework and creating incentives for employers to hire youth.

Main Outcomes:

- Stakeholders should continue to evaluate and learn from youth employability and skills development programs. One specific knowledge gap relates to life skills, their definition, and how they can help youth to gain employment. The benefits of service learning programs should also be investigated.
- We must encourage employers to take a chance on hiring youth, whether through wage subsidies, other non-financial incentives, or reforms to the legal framework. NGOs are well positioned to bridge the gap between the private sector and young people, and to create an enabling environment for dialogue between the groups. The incentives needed to hire young women in particular should also be considered.

Understanding What Works: Integrating Effective Evaluation Practices into Youth Skills Development Programs

Panelists:

- Susan Ayari, Education Team Leader, USAID Jordan
- Jacobus de Hoop, Impact Evaluation Specialist, Understanding Children’s Work
- Nader Kabbani, Director of Research, Syria Trust for Development
- Mattias Lundberg, Senior Economist, Social Protection & Labor, The World Bank

Moderators:

- Kevin Hempel, Consultant, Social Protection & Labor, The World Bank
- Susana Puerto, Manager, Youth Employment Network

Discussion Overview:

In Segment 1 of this session, conference panelists and session participants engaged in a dialogue on key questions relating to monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessments of youth skills development interventions. Panelists stressed the importance of program evaluation in order to help implementers and donors make programming and resource allocation decisions; decide which programs should be taken to scale and which programs should be discontinued; and design new programs that will have a strong likelihood of being effective.

A core component of the discussion revolved around the design and implementation of impact evaluations, the purpose of which are to show whether a given program actually improved the well-being of the lives of program beneficiaries. Panelists stressed that besides defining “well-being” and establishing indicators to measure changes in well-being in a particular context, program implementers need to establish counterfactuals (through control groups) in order to confirm that any observed change can actually be attributed to the program and is not due to other factors. Session participants then launched into a discussion about ethical issues associated with the use of control groups (whose members are not able to participate in training or other support services offered by a program.) Panelists agreed that control groups are both *necessary* to ensure that the programs we design and implement are effective and *ethical* as long as the beneficiary selection process is fair and transparent. Finally panelists argued that not all programs should necessarily include impact evaluations. One panelist argued that only new and/or innovative programs should include impact evaluations, or those programs which can easily support the costs involved in undertaking an impact evaluation without drawing key resources away from program implementation.

Finally, session moderator Kevin Hempel introduced the GPYE Monitoring & Evaluation Guide (content can be downloaded online at: <http://www.gpye.org/measuring-success-youth-livelihood-interventions>) – for use by youth workforce development practitioners across the Middle East and Africa. The audience was also encouraged to join the Youth Employment Network’s online community of practice on M&E of youth employment programs (accessible at: <http://yenclinic.groupsite.com/>) to access and share knowledge and experience.

In Segment 2, session participants split into small groups to discuss concrete topics of interest with regard to monitoring and evaluating youth skills development programs in the MENA region. The topics covered and takeaways from each session are below.

Group 1 – Strategies for Integrating M&E into the Project Life Cycle

- The group began by presenting and discussing a condensed project life cycle: (1) planning and design; (2) implementation and monitoring; and (3) evaluation and learning. The group argued about the usefulness of using a condensed design, versus expanding it to include more nuanced elements of the project cycle, such as problem identification/needs assessment.
- After dividing into three groups to discuss the topics, participants came to a general consensus on several key issues:
 - On the question of how project managers and evaluators relate to each other, program practitioners have a challenge to overcome, which is that they sometimes

perceive M&E negatively and that its purpose is “to catch us in mistakes rather than help us make our programming more effective.” Likewise, evaluators are often not well understood and receive little support by practitioners.

- The best solution to this issue is to involve the practitioners in the evaluation process, from design of the evaluation to implementation to reporting of findings.
- It is also important for project managers to listen to evaluators and to support them when needed and for evaluators to be sensitive to the concerns of practitioners and continuously emphasize the learning potential of the evaluation.
- Lack of communication on M&E – between the donor, the project implementation team, and the beneficiaries – is a key issue which can make monitoring and evaluating programs difficult.
- All programs should include M&E systems, which should be integrated from the beginning of the project (i.e., during the project planning phase). M&E systems do not need to be complex; in fact, a simple project could have a simple M&E system.
- Evaluations tend to focus on impact, but they should also be carried out on implementation (process evaluation) and project design.

Group 2 – Designing and Implementing Impact Evaluations

- The group engaged in a discussion about issues that should be considered before designing an effective impact evaluation:
 - What is the audience for the impact evaluation? It might be policy makers, or it might be donors. Implementers must ensure that the purpose and results of an impact evaluation are concrete and easy to explain to the appropriate audience.
 - What is being evaluated? A project or a policy/group of policies? Projects may be easier to evaluate, but policies may have more of a national reach or broader impact. The distinction partly determines the tools available to conduct an evaluation.
 - What is the policy question? What are the evaluators trying to discover or understand? This led to a discussion of indicators. Often one can find indicators that directly represent the outcomes of interest, but sometimes one has to rely on proxies, either because of time constraints or because the outcome is inherently hard to measure.
 - Evaluators may need to show donors or other audiences the impact of a project during a very short timeframe; therefore the impact evaluation design must be appropriate to the timeframe given.
 - Implementers should consider the different types of impact evaluation methodologies available (e.g., experimental vs. quasi-experimental).
 - Implementers should differentiate between outputs, outcomes, and impacts and should be aware that it is often more difficult to measure long-term impacts than short-term impacts.
 - The group agreed that we are usually more interested in long-term outcomes, but that we are forced to concentrate on short-run outcomes due to time and budget constraints as well as political pressures.

Group 3 – Effective Measurement and Evaluation of Life Skills Programs

- There was debate among participants over the definition of “life skills” and if such skills can be taught or, rather, that they are attributes that some young people develop and others don’t. For example, participants debated whether “confidence” was a skill or an attribute and therefore whether it could actually be taught.
- Various members provided suggestions for how to measure life skills given that measuring qualitative skills is much harder than measuring quantitative skills. Trainers indicated that they measured life skills acquisition on the basis of trainee observation, feedback from

- parents, and trainee self-assessments. Small group participants all agreed that such measurement practices were subjective.
- Some additional suggestions for measuring life skills acquisition included: pre-, mid-, and post-program questionnaires; aspiration statements or target setting; diaries/journals kept by beneficiaries over the course of the project; trainer observation and evaluation; personal interviews with defined questions; and trainee self-appraisal.
 - Participants asked how the successful development of life skills in individuals can be attributed to a given program, as there are a number of external factors that can also have an effect on life skills acquisition (including society, home life, school, and relationships). Participants agreed that it is necessary to make certain assumptions when monitoring and evaluating and that it is okay to do so as long as such assumptions are included in the program log-frame and final evaluation.
 - All participants agreed on the importance of life skills in the labor market. Employers realize that they are able to teach technical skills to their new employees, but they do not have the time or the resources to develop training programs that target life skills development. Participants agreed that it is of vital importance that the development of life skills starts at a young age and that educational establishments place more emphasis on life skills development over rote learning and memorization.

Group 4 – Addressing Evaluation Issues in the Education Sector

- Participants agreed that there should be defined and articulated learning standards at all grade levels and across all subject areas.
- They also agreed that a curriculum should be developed that allows teachers to teach directly to these standards; the standards should also be transparent and available to the public.
- Panelists discussed the development of a national assessment tool (a norm-referenced test) which would be based on the national teaching curriculum.
- Panelists recommended the elimination of high-stakes tests to mark the end of public education (grade 12) such as the Tawjihi exam.
- Teachers are often used to only one form of M&E – testing (leading up to Tawjihi exam) – facilitated by memorization and repetition, and may need to be educated about the purpose of other forms of evaluation. Panelists recommend that teachers be trained in, for example:
 - Teaching to standards, not to a test
 - Developing authentic assessments by which to evaluate student learning
 - The diversity of assessments and evaluations available, including
 - High stakes vs. summative vs. formative evaluation
 - Continuous assessments
 - Project-based assessments
- Panelists suggested that when M&E practitioners engage teachers and educators, they should ensure that teachers understand the purpose of the evaluation and why they are being asked to take part. This will avoid the impression that the evaluation only serves to rate their performance and will also enhance ownership of the evaluation.

Group 5 – Involving Youth in Program Design, Implementation, Management, and Evaluation

- Participants agreed that youth can potentially be involved in all aspects of the program lifecycle, including needs assessment, project design and planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- In terms of mechanisms for engaging youth in such projects, most participants indicated that they often surveyed youth through questionnaires and interviewed them in focus groups. Other program implementers actively engaged youth in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of youth employment programs.

- Participants agreed that there are currently structural barriers (including institutions and policies) and entrenched attitudes about the lack of youth capabilities that prevent youth from being actively involved in project development and evaluation.
- Some participants saw limitations to youth participation because youth do not yet have the education and experience that adults have.
- Participants suggested that more time and effort should be dedicated to exploring this topic, exchanging expertise, and developing effective tools and mechanisms for youth involvement especially in the MENA region.

Group 6 – Barriers to Implementing Effective M&E in the MENA Region and Ideas for Addressing Such Barriers

- Participants spoke about a lack of awareness and understanding of M&E in the MENA region – many program implementers see M&E as a donor requirement rather than a tool that can offer valuable feedback for ongoing program improvement.
- Many participants agreed that donor-derived evaluation questions may not take into consideration cultural issues (or be translated poorly) because they are standardized across geographical areas.
- Because evaluations are often donor-driven, participants suspect that practitioners may sometimes doctor their results in order to please donors and thereby help to ensure revenue streams for their programs.
- Participants mentioned a lack of communication across sectors involved in a given program (government, private, NGO); donors may require use of their own M&E systems even if another system already exists in a specific local context.
- Participants also complained about a lack of human resources (appropriately trained employees) and financial resources (limited program budgets) for effective M&E.
- Participants made a number of recommendations for addressing the barriers described above:
 - Donors need to provide long-term commitments to programs in order to ensure the functioning of an appropriate, effective, and long-term M&E systems.
 - The community of practitioners needs to educate local partners on the value of M&E; if there is greater awareness of the importance of M&E, there is a greater likelihood of accurate data reporting.
 - Funds should be set aside to build the capacity of local program staff to design and implement effective M&E systems.
 - A greater number of M&E tools need to be available in Arabic.
 - In order to encourage cooperation across sectors, a mapping of existing M&E systems in the MENA region should be carried out and shared.

Lunchtime Plenary:

Alliances for Youth Development:

The Power of Partnerships in Addressing Youth Unemployment

Panelists:

- Maha Al-Shaikh, Project Officer of Health & Education, AGFUND
- Samir Hulileh, CEO, PADICO Holdings
- Dahlia Khalifa, Regional Head, e4e Initiative for Arab Youth, IFC – World Bank Group
- H. E. Michael Nazzal, Senator and Head of Jordan Federation of Tourism Associations

Moderator: Michael Harvey, Mission Director, USAID West Bank/Gaza

Discussion Overview:

This session highlighted the role of public-private partnerships in helping to address employment-related challenges faced by large numbers of youth in the MENA region. According to the panelists, one of the most significant factors contributing to the region's high youth unemployment rate is the fact that vast numbers of young people do not graduate from secondary or tertiary education with the technical and life skills that would help them enter the private sector. Meanwhile, many of the region's public sectors are bloated and can no longer absorb the burgeoning numbers of new graduates.

The panelists highlighted the important role the private sector can play in bridging the gap between education and employment and gave specific examples of effective partnerships between the private sector and the public education system in Jordan. The Jordanian hospitality sector, for instance, recently received permission from the Jordanian government to manage a hospitality college in Amman. Once the Jordanian Tourism Association took over the management of the college, the association improved course curriculum to make it more relevant to market needs. The college is now graduating young people with the skills necessary to work in Jordan's quickly growing tourism industry and large numbers of Jordanians are serving in key positions in the hotel industry that were once solely the domain of foreign workers. In a similar way, the pharmaceutical sector has worked with the Jordanian university system to train students with the technical and retail skills needed to market and sell pharmaceuticals.

The panelists also stressed that, in engaging the private sector, it is important for representatives from both the public and civil society sectors not only to speak about "good corporate citizenship" and a corporation's "responsibility" to give back to the communities in which it works, but also about how an investment in the region's young people is crucial to a corporation's bottom line. An educated, well-skilled, and technically-literate youth population not only produces a broader, deeper, and more diversified hiring pool, but gainful employment for youth also translates into the availability of the kind of discretionary income that will allow a new generation to consume the products and make use of the services that the private sector produces.

Finally, panelists focused on the importance of life skills training to produce a skilled and job-ready workforce. While technical skills are very important (particularly language and ICT skills), some speculate that because of the speed at which technology is developing that at some point mid-century, as soon as a technological skill is mastered, it will become obsolete. Therefore, the most important skills for young people to learn in school are transferable life skills such as how to think critically, take initiative, engage in team work, and become an effective leader.

Main Outcomes:

- We must find new ways to create partnerships between the private sector, educational institutions, and civil society organizations to improve the skills and competencies of youth and match them with private sector needs.
- The private sector should encourage fellowships, internships, mentorships, and related activities that enhance the practical skills and capacities of youth.
- Volunteerism and service learning programs should be encouraged, as the private sector has noticed that youth who engage in voluntary work and participate in community service initiatives become more committed, responsible, and effective employees.

“Where Do We Go From Here?”

Participant Discussions led by Young Social Entrepreneurs from the MENA Region

Facilitators:

- Fida Abu Turkey, 2011 Award Recipient, King Abdullah II Award for Youth Innovation and Achievement
- Ahmad Alhindawi, 2008 IYF YouthActionNet Fellow
- Amr Sobhy, 2011 African Leadership Academy and MasterCard Foundation Anzisha Prize Winner
- Rabee Zureikat, 2009 Award Recipient, King Abdullah II Award for Youth Innovation and Achievement
- Hala Al-Hejin, Account Manager for Financial Services, Microsoft Saudi Arabia

Moderator: Hana Al-Araj, Presenter, Jordan TV

Discussion Overview:

This session provided an opportunity for conference participants to engage in discussions on best practices for youth employment as a culmination of key learning points from earlier conference sessions. Guided by a short case study scenario and five young social entrepreneurs who facilitated small group discussions, conference participants played the role of donors making decisions to ensure funding would be used to support effective youth employment programming.

Following the small group discussions, each young social entrepreneur shared with the entire group key priority areas from their discussion group, enhancing discussion points with reflections and examples from their personal experiences leading social enterprises. The session concluded with an open discussion for all workshop participants to share final thoughts and suggestions regarding challenges and opportunities for effective youth employment programming. The tangible output of the session was a list of priority areas that deserve further resource investment by the youth development community (see “main outcomes” below).

Main Outcomes:

- Because programs are most effective when they meet the current and future needs of youth, needs assessments are a crucial first step in designing a successful intervention. This can be supported by conducting participatory rapid appraisals, focus groups, and consulting previous studies.
- Youth participation is crucial at all levels of program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Capacity building for implementing organizations and training providers is critical for short-term project success and to support long-term effectiveness.
- Public-private partnerships are necessary to ensure stakeholder buy-in and a wide base of support for interventions. NGOs should build multi-sector alliances with stakeholder to support effective and sustainable programs.
- Monitoring and evaluation are important tools that can improve program design and implementation and lead to replicable, scalable solutions for youth employment challenges.

DAY 3: Effective Practices Workshops to Address Youth Unemployment in Jordan

Morning Workshops

**Workshop A:
Effective Career Guidance and Job Placement Strategies:
Setting Realistic Expectations for First-Time Job Seekers**

Panelists:

- Nadera Al-Bakheet, Assistant Secretary General, Ministry of Labour
- Issam Othman, Career Guidance Advisor, Best Project
- Ghada Salem, Program Coordinator, Best Project
- Sherihan Abd El Rahman, Managing Assistant, adgee Group
- Fatima Mustafa, Zain Al Sharaf CBO, Mafraq

Moderator: Raba'a Al-Haj Hassan, Head of Employment and Career Guidance, Ministry of Labor

Discussion Overview:

This session explored Youth:Work Jordan's experience in matching the skills and interests of youth at risk with demand-driven jobs required by today's employers, particularly the program's career guidance approach of instilling realistic expectations for youth and their parents. The panelists highlighted that vocational and career guidance, in a general sense, can include a variety of educational, psychological, and training-based strategies that take into account information from the job market and cultural considerations about society and the local community. Professionals who provide guidance play an important role in networking and providing a link between the requirements of employers and the aspirations of job seekers.

Main Outcomes:

- It is important for us to gain access to the plans resulting from the National Strategy for Career Guidance and to work towards implementing its recommendations through partnerships.
- It is necessary to work on increasing women's economic participation in the job market by providing a safe working environment and being fair in the distribution of employment opportunities.
- We must equip career guidance counselors with the necessary tools and skills that will enable them to provide their services to youth.
- The role of the family is extremely important in integrating career guidance into society and making it an important and valuable part of youths' career path.
- The government should commit to implement comprehensive surveys investigating the anticipated needs of the changing labor market.

- We must build on the experiences of partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations and activate these partnerships in order to bridge the gap between youth needs and labor market requirements.

**Workshop B:
Maximizing Chances for Youth Employment:
Designing Effective Life Skills Programs for Youth at Risk**

Panelists:

- Waleed Muheisen, Ministry of Social Development
- Taghreed Al-Waked, Life Skills Trainer
- Ikab Atiyeh, Life Skills Consultant, Luminus Education
- Adeeba Hijazi, Senior Trainer for Child Safety Program, Jordan River Foundation
- Shereen Abu Sarbel, Life Skills Trainer, Al Taawon CBO, Southern Shouneh

Moderator: Mays Shabakaneh, Life Skills Specialist, Youth:Work Jordan

Discussion Overview:

Life skills are considered to be the main tool necessary to prepare the youth for the world of work. Youth who are at-risk and are in disadvantaged or precarious situations pose a particular challenge, as these youth have very special characteristics that need to be understood, but life skills are still relevant to their situation. In particular, life skills training is essential in order to address the low values that youth currently possess with regards to issues such as respect for themselves and others, personal responsibility, ethical behavior, and their understanding of freedom.

Timing is a very important consideration, and programs must be highly structured. It is best to introduce life skills training at an early age, preferably before the age of 16. There is a great opportunity to integrate life skills training into the school curriculum, or at least to offer training programs to teachers as part of their professional capacity building. The percentage of high school drop-outs in Jordan has increased by approximately 10% during the past 10 years. This is a sign that the quality of teaching and the capacity of teachers must urgently be improved.

Working specifically with at-risk youth requires specialized professionals who have the skill and the spirit to create change and to build hope for these youth. Additionally, building the capacity of local trainers can be a great asset and is preferable to bringing in outsiders, as the local trainers are more familiar with the needs of their own communities. Therefore, we must create specific criteria for those trainers who are eligible to work with the target group of at-risk youth.

Main Outcomes:

- A clear understanding of the needs of at-risk youth is essential before designing programs, which must address the youths' individual needs and help them believe that they are productive and important to their community.
- Cultural barriers are one of the main challenges to life skills training, as parents and community members are not always supportive and tolerant of subjects that have traditionally been considered off-limits. Trainers and program staff must work simultaneously with parents when developing training for youth.

- Some current training models need to be improved. We should focus on practical models and training camps where youth can actually live the experience and put what they learn into practice. Specific skills should be addressed rather than theoretical lessons.
- We need to increase the level of trust of the private sector towards at-risk youth and encourage the private sector to invest more in the career development of these youth.

Afternoon Workshops

Workshop C:

Partnering with Jordan's Business Community to Maximize Job Placement Outcomes

Panelists:

- Areej Zgheilat, Head of Local Economic Development Division, Development Zones Commission and Free Zones
- Mohammad Taamari, Training Manager, Jordan Career Education Foundation
- Maher Al-Mahrouq, Director General, Jordan Chamber of Industry
- Wael Al-Daoud, CEO, Extensya
- Nadia Ismail, Khreibet Al Souk CBO, East Amman

Moderator: Qais Qatamin, Fund Manager, Employment, Technical and Vocational Education Training (E-TVET)

Discussion Overview:

This session provided the perspective of Jordanian private sector leaders on the challenges of preparing youth for the workplace and providing them with employment. Challenges exist on all sides and the need is enormous – 60,000 jobs must be created by the private sector each year just to maintain the current unemployment rate of 12.8%.

The panelists reiterated the fact that youth lack certain key skills to qualify them for the labor market, particularly specialized technical and vocational training, English-language skills, and the interpersonal skills needed to succeed in the workplace. Many fresh university graduates are lacking these skills, and a national training initiative is needed to provide this training to youth entering the labor market. The process of matching youth with job opportunities in the market must start with a labor market assessment – surveying a representative sample of the 100,000 companies in the Jordanian labor market, the available job opportunities, and the nature of these job opportunities including salaries and benefits. Another challenge is that although job opportunities are available, there is no centralized job database system that lists available positions for job-seekers.

Another focus of the discussion was how to transform current working environments in the public and private sectors into youth-friendly and healthy environments. Many businesses in Jordan currently have unfriendly working environments with no clear rules and regulations, a lack of career advancement opportunities for youth, and disrespectful treatment of employees. They also fail to take into consideration measures to make the workplace friendly to women, resulting in a very low rate of labor force participation.

In order to work successfully with the private sector, youth and the organizations serving them must adapt their approaches as well. Among youth, negative attitudes include laziness, the “culture of

shame,” dissatisfaction with salaries offered in the labor market, and distrust of employers regarding the disclosure of accurate job descriptions and the nature of work. Among youth-serving programs and organizations, challenges include the high number of organizations working without coordination or cooperation, the lack of sustainability of donor-funded programs that stop suddenly, and the failure to scale up successful and proven programs rather than continually starting new initiatives. Many of these problems can be addressed by forming partnerships between the public, private, and civil society sectors and by actively involving youth in program design and sustainability measures.

Main Outcomes:

- Youth must be provided with the skills and knowledge that is actually demanded by the labor market. When these needs are not addressed by the educational system, private sector employers must form partnerships with vocational training centers and civil society organizations to train youth.
- Organizations working on youth employability must increase their coordination in order to learn from best practices and not replicate each other’s efforts.
- Coordination is necessary at a national level on labor market assessments and employment databases to ensure that information about work is widely available and easily accessible.
- All members of the partnership must work to improve youth attitudes regarding employment opportunities. The private sector must be willing to welcome newcomers to the labor market every year, cooperate to provide necessary training, and create friendly working environments for youth and women within their businesses.

**Workshop D:
Vocational Skills Training:
Reforming Jordan’s Vocational Training Programs**

Panelists:

- Anas Al-Majali, Training and Development Manager, Jordanian Hospitality and Tourism Education Company (JHTEC)
- Hani Khleifat, Deputy Director, Vocational Training Center
- Mufeed Daoud, Managing Director, Vocational Training and Development Center, Luminus Education and Sherihan Abd El Rahman, Managing Assistant, adgee Group
- Essam Samara, Director, LG
- Susanne Grigoleit, Tourism Workforce Development Specialist
- Rizeq Awartani, Prince Talal Bin Mohammad CBO, Russaifeh

Moderator: Salah Abu Osbeh, Executive Director, Talal Abu Ghazaleh Organization

Discussion Overview:

This session focused on strategies to improve vocational training programs in Jordan. The hospitality and tourism sector was chosen as a case study given its particular importance for Jordan. This sector employed 42,000 people last year and it is expected that an additional 29,000 employees will be needed this year. At the current time, the hospitality sector is not very well accepted or perceived to be desirable by youth entering the labor market in Jordan. However, by working with youth, their parents, and community members to raise awareness about the opportunities in this sector, the

situation can improve. Vocational training centers play an important role in this process by teaching youth about the hospitality sector and giving them the chance to choose which department in a hotel they might like, as most youth have never entered a hotel before and are not aware of the diverse job types available.

Throughout this process, vocational training curricula should focus not only on technical training but on soft skills such as positive attitudes and teamwork. Improving vocational training should be a national priority and a national initiative, which is why a variety of stakeholders must be involved, including the private sector, the public sector, civil society, and youth. In particular the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor must ensure that youth are taken into consideration and legal frameworks are in place to protect them in the workplace.

Main Outcomes:

- Stakeholders should establish a database linked to youth priorities and labor market needs, starting with a pilot study in a few schools and vocational training institutions. They must also work to update tools and resources, and provide incentives for trainers to improve their performance.
- Organizations working with youth must raise awareness on vocational training for it to be accepted by society. Specifically, parents and community members must be involved in career counseling programs to increase their understanding and commitment. CBOs should stress the importance of vocational training in successfully finding a job.
- All vocational training programs should be demand-driven and linked to the labor market. National quality assurance standards for vocational training programs should be updated and adhered to. Accreditation and certification is important for high-quality programs.
- Soft skills and life skills should be integrated into vocational training curricula at all stages.
- Vocational training programs should focus not just on Amman, but also on governorates designated as “poverty pockets” across the country.