



SCHOLARSHIPS & TRAINING FOR EGYPTIAN PROFESSIONALS

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Semi-Annual Progress Report

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I. Executive Summary

This progress report covers the period from October 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015. Throughout the past six months, STEP staff continued to meet regularly with the USAID COR and Education Team members. Collaboration continued with project counterparts: the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), and the Adult Education Authority (AEA). The STEP team also continued to meet with project partners AFS, Education for Employment (EFE), Nahdet El Mahrousa (NM), AUC, and Career Development and Consultancy Academy (CDC), to review project activities and discuss lessons learned and recommendations for the upcoming cohorts for the academic scholarships as well as technical assistance activities. A significant project achievement during this reporting period consists of the enrollment of cohorts 1 of both the HEI MBA and the STEM undergraduate scholarships in the University Preparation Programs at AUC. Outreach efforts for cohorts 2 ended for the STEM undergraduate scholarships and are in progress for the MBA scholarships. In addition, activities included short-term technical assistance (STTA) assignments requested by the USAID Education Technical Office and the Democracy & Governance office. Deliverables consisting of accrual reports were submitted on time.

II. Program Highlights

- **Update Meeting – Ministry of Education (MOE)**

On October 21, 2014, the IIE STEP management team accompanied by COR, Jana Wooden, and Education Specialist, Hala El Serafy, met with the MOE Head of General Education, Mr. Mohamed Saad, to give him a final update on the selection process and outcome for cohort 1 of the HEI STEM undergraduate scholarships program. The STEP COP summarized each phase of the selection process and the justification and rationale behind the process that led to the final selection of 23 participants, in collaboration with USAID. Mr. Saad was pleased to see representation from various governorates outside greater Cairo and Alexandria.

- **Joint Information sessions with the Ministry of Education (MOE)**

In an effort to increase awareness of the HEI STEM Undergraduate scholarships and reach out to high school (Thanawya Amma) students across the governorates, the STEP team successfully partnered with the Ministry of Education's Senior School Education Department to conduct joint information sessions across 21 governorates.

Working in collaboration with Mr. Lamoum Moussa, Head of MOE Senior Education and his team, the STEP project created a plan to conduct information sessions in each of 17 governorates, including two in Cairo (*please see Annex 1 for details*) specifically targeting underserved regions. The MOE took the lead in coordinating all details of the information sessions with the respective Muderiyas and Idaras in each governorate, as well as provided a member of the MOE Senior Education team to accompany the STEP Outreach and Recruitment Specialist and/or STEP's partner, AFS, to each of these info sessions.

This partnership with the MOE increased awareness and credibility of the scholarship, as well as demonstrated MOE support of the program and its objectives. Potential applicants and school representatives witnessed first-hand the Ministry's endorsement of the program and the value of the scholarship opportunity. In parallel to the information sessions for students and school representatives, STEP partner AFS conducted 24 orientation sessions in 19 governorates for those who could not attend the MOE sessions as well as parents, to increase their awareness and answer any questions or concerns families may have, related to their daughters studying abroad. (*Please see Annex 1 for details*).

- **First USG Delegation Visit – HEI Cohorts 1 Participants**

Immediately after the start of the University Preparation Program (UPP) at the AUC, the STEP IIE team facilitated a USG delegation visit to cohorts 1 of the HEI STEM and MBA scholarship participants on October 14, 2014. The delegation was led by USAID’s Associate Administrator, Mark Feierstein, the Deputy Assistant administrator for the Middle East Bureau, Alina Romanowski, USAID/Egypt Mission Director, Mary Ott, USAID/Egypt Education Office Director, Thomas Crehan, USAID/Egypt Director of Communication, Julie Fossler, COR, Jana Wooden, Assistant to Associate Administrator, Rosarie Tucci, and Control Officer, Matt Curtis. A total of 19 STEM and MBA girls volunteered to talk about their experience applying to the scholarship opportunity, their study objectives and what they hope to achieve upon returning to Egypt. *(Please see Annex 2 for photos of the visit).*

- **Second USG Delegation Visit – HEI Cohorts 1 Participants**

On Monday February 9, 2015, the STEP project facilitated a visit by the USG representatives noted below, to the AUC Zamalek Hostel for a meet and greet with cohorts 1 participants of the HEI STEM undergraduate and MBA scholarships for women. Assistant Administrator, Paige Alexander, and USAID/Egypt Mission Director, Mary Ott, led an informal discussion with the scholarship participants wherein they spoke frankly of what motivated them to apply to the scholarship, their individual backgrounds and study objectives, as well as what they hope to accomplish both during their time in the US and upon their return to Egypt.

Several participants volunteered to share their thoughts and appreciation for the opportunity they have been granted by the USG. Dialogue was followed by a brief Q&A with the Assistant Administrator and the Mission Director, wherein Ms. Alexander invited the participants to visit again with her upon their arrival in Washington D.C. in August 2015. *(Please see Annex 2 for photos of the visit).*

Delegation:

- Paige Alexander, Assistant Administrator, Middle East Bureau
- David Bartholomew, Special Assistant
- Cecile Coronato, Desk Officer
- Mary C. Ott, Mission Director
- Alex Albertine, Control Officer
- Thomas Crehan, Education Office Director
- Jana Wooden, Project Manager
- Julie Fossler, Director of Communication

- **Third USG Delegation Visit – HEI Cohorts 1 Participants**

On Tuesday March 24, 2015, the STEP team facilitated the third visit to date by a USG delegation. The visit was led by Ms. Sherry Carlin, the new USAID/Egypt Mission Director who replaced Dr. Mary Ott in mid- March 2015. The following delegation attended the visit, accompanied by representative from the IIE STEP Project including the COP, DCOP and the Academic Programs team.

- Sherry Carlin, USAID Mission Director
- Thomas Crehan, USAID Education Office Director
- Jana Wooden, USAID Project Manager
- Julie Fossler, USAID Director of Communication

Ms. Carlin engaged in a dialogue with the participants, which included questions regarding their backgrounds, study plans, aspirations for the future and what their career goals are upon return to Egypt. Ms. Carlin indicated that she looks forward to hearing about their progress over the next two years and to meet with them upon return to Egypt. *(Please see Annex 2 for photos of the visit).*

III. Progress

(activities completed, benchmarks achieved, performance standards completed) since the last report)

Since the submission of our previous progress report, the following activities have been implemented throughout the period of October 1, 2014–March 31, 2015, related to the HEI STEM undergraduate and MBA scholarships as well as short-term technical assistance.

A. HEI STEM Undergraduate Scholarships-Cohort 1 (23 candidates)

a. AUC University Preparation Program (UPP)–Part 1 (October 12-December 26, 2014)

Following a rigorous recruitment and selection process outlined in detail in the last progress report, eight STEM undergraduate participants have been enrolled, since October 12, 2014, on a full time basis at the American University in Cairo (AUC) - School of Continuing Education - in a University Preparation Program (UPP), an eight-month bridge program that prepares the students for studies at US universities. Classes are held on a daily basis Sunday through Thursday from 9am to 3pm at the AUC Zamalek hostel where the participants are housed for the duration of the program. The aim of the UPP is to provide participants with a solid English language foundation and critical thinking skills necessary for successful academic studies so that English language ability does not restrict potential candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds. The UPP will also ease the transition for participants and their families to living away from home. Studies include preparation for English language testing - SAT and TOEFL IBT, and pre-academic training.

While 24 participants were selected to enroll in cohort 1 of the HEI STEM undergraduate scholarships program, one student dropped out in the first week of enrollment for family reasons. The currently enrolled 23 participants represent 11 governorates. This number consists of 12 students from the STEM boarding school for girls, three participants respectively from Assiut, Aswan, and Matrouh currently attending their final year of high school pending Thanaweya Amma exam results, and eight enrolled in the eight-month UPP at the AUC. All eight students housed at the AUC hostel receive M&IE for each day spent on campus, as well as medical insurance coverage. The remaining 15 secondary high school students had submitted valid TOEFL scores during the application process, thus allowing them to continue with their final year of high school as opposed to attending the UPP. However they are subject to all other program requirements necessary for acceptance at a U.S. university including the pre-admission tests, in addition to the cultural awareness sessions prior to travel.

Soon after the selection of the participants in cohort 1 of the HEI STEM undergraduate scholarships program, the USAID/Egypt Mission Director issued a congratulatory letter to each student. *(Please see Annex 3 for a sample).*

Between October 23-26, 2014, each student enrolled at the AUC signed the UPP policy and financial commitment letter approved by USAID. The letter outlines the rules and regulations for program participation. In addition, it stipulates that if, upon completion of the UPP, participants decline to continue with the program and travel to study in the US, they will be required to reimburse the project for the expenses incurred to-date. *(Please see Annex 4 for the template).*

The eight-month UPP for the eight STEM undergraduate participants is divided into two parts as follows:

Part I: October 12-December 31, 2014, consisted of training on the following:

1. English for academic purposes (90 hours)
2. SAT preparation (120 hours)
3. TOEFL/IELTS preparation (90 hours)

These courses are delivered five days a week, five hours each day, for a total of 300 instruction hours.

Part II: January 2015-May 31, 2015, consists of training on the following:

1. Presentation & Communication Skills (90 hours)
2. Academic Reading Skills (100 hours)
3. Academic Writing & Research Skills (240 hours)
4. Study Skills & Critical Thinking (70 hours)

These courses are delivered five days a week, five hours each day, for a total of 500 instruction hours.

As a result of the tight time frame and the deadlines for application to U.S. universities, the STEP team began early to prepare the participants for the university application process by conducting orientation sessions at AUC on October 19-20 for the students enrolled in the UPP and the 12 students at the ECASE STEM School in Maadi as well as on Oct. 26-27 for the Thanawya Amma students from Matrouh, Assiut and Aswan on completing the IIE “Embark” application. The purpose of the orientation is to cover key specifics of the application process and provide guidance on writing effective personal statements and study objectives essays. The IIE Embark application is an online, web-based tool that follows the same format as the “US Common Application” used to apply to US universities. The IIE placement team in New York uses the Embark application to apply to U.S. universities on behalf of the scholarship participants. During the orientation, the students are also briefed on the testing requirements: TOEFL IBT, SAT, ACT required for placement in U.S. universities that represent the best academic fit for each candidate.

b. Career Self-Assessment (TAMHEED)

In an effort to assist the participants in identifying study fields which directly relate to their interests, career goals and areas of strength, the STEP project implementing partner Nahdet El Mahrousa (NM) facilitated, during the second half of October 2014, Career Self-Assessment sessions (Tamheed) for all 23 undergraduate participants. Tamheed is a psychometric assessment which aims to scientifically evaluate an individual’s abilities, personality traits and interests. The tool utilized by NM is administered online with a user friendly interface. The assessment tool has been contextualized into Arabic and French, and adapted for the region.

On October 21, NM administered an orientation session for the 23 undergraduate participants to prepare them for the self-assessment test which utilizes two distinct types of assessments to measure different aspects of each candidate’s abilities as follows:

1. Cognitive
 - Alphabet assessment: measures basic literacy skills. It assesses the speed of perceiving letters and selecting them into alphabetical order. These are the foundation skills that allow individuals to read and write fluently and use language proficiently.
 - Number Fluency: measures basic numeracy skills. It assesses an individual’s understanding, reasoning and ability when performing numerical tasks including addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.
2. Personality

- SIED: This is a personality assessment that measures individual differences in motivation and preferences. There is no right or wrong answer when completing this assessment.
- JOIN: is the Jobs and Occupations Inventory. It measures individual interests and motivations in terms of careers.

A week after the participants took the assessment test, NM organized one-on-one career counseling / coaching sessions on October 27-29 with a certified advisor to review individual results. During the session, the advisor and the student discuss career related issues. A session is typically 20-30 minutes long, with a focused discussion specifically related to the assessment results and how these can be used to focus on study and career goals.

The counseling session consists of three parts as follows:

1. Part I: Serves as a means for the counselor to create a personal relation with the student, and get to know her by establishing a trusting and friendly environment for dialogue.
2. Part II: Tamheed is analyzed and the results of the assessment are explained to the student.
3. Part III: Advisor provides career related advice tailored to each student and feedback on potential study and career objectives / options.

c. STEM undergraduate testing requirements (SAT and TOEFL IBT)

During the week of November 2-6, 2014 the IIE STEP team completed registration for all 23 cohort 1 participants to sit for the mandatory TOEFL IBT and SAT tests. On December 6, 2014, 22 STEM participants took the SAT test (one student, Mayar Mossad Allam, already had a valid SAT score). Upon completion of the test, each participant received a confirmation email from the U.S. College Board informing them of a five-week delay in releasing the scores due to testing irregularities. The STEP team notified the IIE NY placement office to include an official notification letter with the application to U.S. universities, to avoid delays in the placement process. Scores were received during the third week of January 2015 and shared with the placement team, who then advised that eight students are recommended for a re-take to improve their chances and choices for admission to U.S. universities. To avoid missing admission deadlines, and since the first available test date for the SAT was scheduled for May 2015, the STEP team registered the eight students for the ACT test scheduled for April 18, 2015.

On January 10, 2015, all 23 STEM participants sat for the TOEFL IBT test. Two participants scored below 70 and, based on feedback from IIE's placement team, were scheduled for a retake in late March 2015.

d. AUC University Preparation Program (UPP)–Part 2 (January 11–May 31, 2015)

On January 11, 2015, following a 10-day break for studying and attending TOEFL IBT test, students resumed their classes for part II of the UPP focusing on academic and critical thinking skills as well as intercultural training to prepare them for life in the US among different societal norms and cultures.

Part 2 of the UPP focuses on:

1. Presentation & Communication Skills (90 hrs)
2. Academic Reading Skills (100 hrs)
3. Academic Writing & Research Skills (240 hrs)
4. Study Skills & Critical Thinking (70 hrs)

These courses are delivered five days a week, five hours each day, for a total of 500 instruction hours.

e. STEM Undergraduate Placement/Submissions

On February 10, 2015, the IIE STEP team received the first preliminary submission plan for the 23 undergraduate students which included submissions to three-to-five universities per candidate, selected to fit the students' study objectives and profiles. Since then, IIE continues to receive updated information on the submission plans on a weekly basis.

IIE STEP team works closely with the placement office to review the submission plans, answer questions related to study objectives, further define fields of study and work with the students to revise their study objectives essays when necessary to ensure that every effort is made to place each participant in their field of choice.

f. Cultural Awareness Activity–STEM Undergraduates

The STEM undergraduates UPP also includes activities which help participants to acquire the intercultural awareness necessary to transition to life in the United States. One of these activities, E3raf Baladak, is implemented by STEP's partner, NM.

The activity was implemented from January 29–February 2, 2015. It focused on cultural diversity, effective communication and identity. On January 16, 2015, NM conducted a preparatory orientation session to discuss trip objectives and logistics. At the orientation session, the participants were asked to submit a signed parental consent form which secures parental approval for the participants to travel to Aswan with program representatives for three days. The trip was labeled: "Nuba and the Lake".

The participants' feedback on the trip was very positive; it confirmed they learned how to appreciate Egypt's diverse natural and cultural identities, while learning how human innovation can come from nature. The trip included an introduction to Nubian culture, biomimicry, understanding the water flow in Egypt, from the Nile water properties and riparian geopolitics to the engineering of the high dam and its impact on the Nubians, their culture and livelihoods. The trip also encompassed activities on team building, site visits to the Nubian museum, interviews with the local community and reflection discussions. *(Please see Annex 5 for the trip report and pictures).*

B. HEI MBA Scholarship–Cohort 1 (56 candidates)

a. AUC University Preparation Program (UPP)–Part 1 (October 12–December 26, 2014)

On October 12, 2014, HEI MBA scholarship participants began a six-month bridge program of English language skills, GMAT and TOEFL preparation, and pre-academic training at the School of Continuing Education of the American University in Cairo, Zamalek campus. On campus accommodation is provided for 29 participants who reside in governorates outside greater Cairo, in addition to Meals & Incidental (M&IE) allowances on a monthly basis and medical insurance coverage. The remaining 27 participants residing in Cairo receive a daily transportation allowance to allow them to commute to and from the AUC Zamalek hostel where classes are held.

In cooperation with the COR, STEP had originally selected 60 candidates to enroll in the six-month bridge program at AUC. Several dropped out during the first week mostly for work related reasons. Between replacement of drop-outs by alternates and late drop-outs, the number of participants settled by late October 2014 to 57 representing 17 governorates.

Soon after the selection of the participants in cohort 1 of the HEI MBA scholarships program, the USAID/Egypt Mission Director issued a congratulatory letter to each scholar. *(Please see Annex 6 for a sample).*

Between October 23 and 26, 2014, each participant in the MBA scholarships program signed the UPP policy and financial commitment letter approved by USAID. The letter outlines the rules and regulations for program participation. In addition, it stipulates that if, upon completion of the UPP, participants decline to continue with the program and travel to study in the US, they will be required to reimburse the project for the expenses incurred to-date. *(Please see Annex 7 for the template).*

In spite of several warnings, one participant was released on March 7, 2015; due to serious lack of commitment behavior displayed by repeated absences, late arrival/early departure, as well as mediocre performance. The number of participants, as of March 31, 2015, is 56.

The six-month UPP is divided into two parts as follows:

Part 1 of the UPP focused on the following:

1. TOEFL Test Preparation (100 hrs)
2. GMAT Test Preparation (100 hrs)

Part 1 ended on December 26, 2014, to allow participants a break for studying and attending GMAT and TOEFL testing. Part 2 classes began on January 14, 2015.

To prepare the scholars for the U.S. university applications process, on October 18, 2014, the STEP Academic Programs team conducted a comprehensive orientation session on the IIE Embark application. As previously noted, the purpose of the orientation was to cover key specifics of the application process and provide guidance on writing effective personal statements and study objectives essays. In addition, participants were briefed on the requirement of GMAT and TOEFL IBT tests for placement in the universities that represent the best academic fit for each of them. By November 13, 2014, all students had submitted their online applications to the IIE NY placement team for review.

b. MBA Testing requirements (GMAT and TOEFL IBT)

During the period of November 2-15, 2014, the IIE STEP team registered the 57 MBA participants for the mandatory GMAT and TOEFL IBT tests. Participants were scheduled to sit for the tests starting December 19, 2014, through January 13, 2015.

In Early February 2015, the IIE STEP team began receiving unofficial GMAT and TOEFL IBT scores for the students. Scores were shared with the IIE NY placement team to determine who will need to retake the tests given the score requirements at U.S. universities. The placement team recommended that students who scored below 500 in GMAT and below 80 in TOEFL IBT should retake the tests to improve their chances and choices for admission at U.S. universities. A total of 17 students re-took the TOEFL IBT in early March 2015 and 47 retook the GMAT in late March 2015.

As a result of the required retakes, STEP worked in collaboration with the AUC program team to allocate additional hours for GMAT and TOEFL preparation to provide additional assistance to participants in need.

c. MBA Placement/Submissions

On February 10, 2015, the IIE NY placement team completed the first submission plan summary indicating potential placements at three-to-five universities for each applicant. The placement team continues to provide weekly updates on the submission plans with final placements expected by May 2015. To avoid delays in the admission process, the IIE placement team submitted applications to universities with the understanding that

admission decisions would be conditional and contingent upon receiving adequate GMAT and TOEFL IBT scores.

d. Cultural Awareness Activities–MBA

In partnership with Nahdet El Mahrousa (NM), a total of four, two-day cultural awareness sessions for the MBA participants were conducted every weekend throughout February 2015. The “Misriyati” cultural awareness program consisted of sessions on tolerance for cultural diversity, effective communication, conflict resolution and identity. *(Please see Annex 8 for full report).*

e. Guest Speakers - MBA topics of interest

In an effort to familiarize the MBA participants with real life examples of professionals in their chosen fields of interest, STEP and the AUC Program Manager introduced an initiative to invite professionals in various business related fields to speak with the MBA participants. On February 23, AUC invited the first key speaker in Money & Banking, Dr. Zeinab ElGawdy, Professor of Economics at Misr University for Science and Technology (MUST). The session focused on Banking and Dollarization and the feedback was very positive.

In early April 2015, another professional recommended by STEP’s partner, AFS-Egypt, will address the scholars. Ms. Randa Abdou, a Senior Executive in the field of Marketing Management, will be the next Guest Speaker. She is an excellent role model as a female entrepreneur and professional.

C. Cross Cutting Initiatives (HEI STEM and MBA Cohorts 1)

a. Bi-weekly Support and Coordination Visits by STEP Team

Since the start of the UPP, the STEP Academic Programs team noted the importance of conducting regular visits to the AUC hostel to meet with the participants of the STEM and MBA cohorts 1. These meetings were held on an average of twice each month and have proven essential in helping participants transition from life at home to full time study at the hostel. The visits gave the team an opportunity to address student concerns and questions as well as monitor progress and provide guidance on individual issues faced by participants. It also provided STEP with the opportunity to monitor student feedback related to the UPP and give constructive feedback on a regular basis to AUC management on potential improvements/adjustments to the program. The visits also helped the STEP team to take note of instructor feedback and address concerns related to student behavior, attitude and commitment when necessary. Listening to student and AUC management comments first hand helped STEP develop lessons learned and make adjustments to program design as well as administrative issues in anticipation of cohorts 2.

In addition to the bi-weekly visits, the STEP Academic Programs team developed a “Monthly Highlights and Tips” brief that is communicated to all participants to help them keep track of upcoming activities, important dates and deadlines as well as overall program news.

b. Issues noted during this reporting period

Participant attendance and punctuality: STEP continuously stresses the importance of punctuality and attendance during the UPP, which not only ensures participants get the maximum benefit from their courses, but also emphasizes the importance of commitment and prepares them for a rigorous and demanding study schedule in the U.S.

Although attendance is mandatory as confirmed by the UPP commitment letter signed by each participant, there have been some cases where warnings were issued, notifying students that if further classes are missed, they will be dismissed from the program. To date, one MBA candidate, Ms. Fatma El Dessouky, was dismissed on March 7 as a result of lack of commitment to course work and assignments as well as excessive absences. Another MBA participant, Ms. Randa Mabrouk, was placed on notice at the beginning of March; to-date, she has complied with the warning received. The STEP team will continue to monitor student performance throughout the remainder of the UPP, to ensure commitment to the program.

Scheduling of classes and tests: Given the testing requirements and their importance and weighting in the overall university admissions process, adjustments were made to the schedule for classes in part 2 of the UPP in an effort to provide students who had to retake tests the opportunity to get additional assistance prior to the second testing dates.

c. HEI Launch Event

Discussions have been ongoing with USAID and the U.S. Embassy since early October 2014 regarding plans for the official launch of the U.S.-Egypt Higher Education Initiative (HEI). Initially, the event was planned to take place last summer. It was then postponed to coincide with the bilateral talks between the U.S. and Egyptian governments originally scheduled for early December 2014. The USG was planning to have high ranking officials participate in the launch to raise public exposure to the event. Due to repeated scheduling conflicts, the launch was postponed several times. In an effort not to further delay the recruitment and outreach of the scholarships under HEI for cohorts 2 of the STEM and MBA planned to begin on January 15, 2015, USAID granted STEP, in late January, approval for a “soft launch” to move ahead in anticipation of a full scale launch after the HEI official launching now scheduled for early March. On February 25, USAID informed STEP that the HEI official launch is again postponed until the second half of April 2015.

In preparation for the HEI official launch, STEP coordinated closely, during the months of January-February 2015, with USAID and U.S. Embassy representatives on the kind of participation of cohorts 1 STEM undergraduate and MBA participants, as well as the Lotus cohort 4 participants on the logistics for the event. STEP and LOTUS were also asked to order giveaways for guests. It was agreed that one volunteer from each of the three scholarship programs would attend to respectively represent their cohort and share their story as well as participate in a dialogue facilitated by Mr. Ibrahim El Kerdany, a well know media figure, an AFS Alumnus, and a Fulbright Scholar.

Furthermore, at the request of the USAID Department of Communications (DOC), the STEP team facilitated efforts of the DOC team in producing a video that displays the impact of ongoing HEI sponsored scholarship programs in Egypt. STEP worked in coordination with the IIE Lotus project to select a candidate from each scholarship program to be highlighted in the video. This effort involved liaising with candidates’ universities where they are enrolled in their bridge program, obtaining approvals, clearances, and arranging logistics for the video shooting at each location, in addition to providing the DOC with feedback on project activities as background information. These efforts were conducted between November 15–December 15, 2014. Actual shooting of the video footage took place on December 14 at the British University in Egypt (BUE) and the AUC Zamalek hostel.

Feedback from USAID and the U.S. Embassy indicates that the April 2015 launch is again expected to be a high level event, hopefully attended by highly ranked officials from both the U.S. and Egypt governments. A total of 150 guests are expected to attend, including 43 MBA and STEM as well as 32 Lotus cohort 4 participants.

D. HEI STEM Undergraduate Scholarships–Cohort 2

During the reporting period of October 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015, only outreach and recruitment tasks were conducted for cohort 2 of the STEM undergraduate scholarships program and outlined in detail below.

a. Cohort 2–STEM Outreach Process

Benefiting from the numerous lessons learned outlined in the previous progress report, the IIE STEP team and partner, AFS, began planning for cohort 2 STEM outreach and recruitment early, by kick starting the process with a partner workshop with the AFS team on October 29, 2014. The objective of the workshop was to review lessons learned, agree on areas of improvement and discuss next steps prior to launching cohort 2 activities. The workshop proved to be very productive and allowed the team to reach consensus on the following main points:

1. **Revised selection criteria** - In the second half of October 2014, the STEP team met with USAID COR Jana Wooden and obtained approval for the revised cohort 2 selection criteria noted in the table below. Changes were made to the criteria to reflect the lessons learned from cohort 1.
2. **English language proficiency of applicants** – On October 26, 2014, STEP received approval from USAID to request applicants to submit a valid TOEFL ITP or IELTS score with their application to the STEM and MBA scholarships. Since valid scores in the SAT/ACT, GMAT and TOEFL IBT tests are mandatory for admission to U.S. Universities, it became clear that applicants unable to score higher than 450 on the TOEFL ITP upon admission to the program are unlikely to achieve the required level of scores needed for US university admission. (*Please refer to the “Challenges” section for further details related to TOEFL ITP testing for cohort 2*).
3. **Verifying financial status** – IIE and its partners continue to make every effort to ensure that the scholarship recipients are from disadvantaged backgrounds. AFS will introduce changes to the home visit rubric in coordination with IIE for cohort 2 applicants to continue to ensure this criterion is met.
4. **Time line for outreach activities** – Given the tight time frame under which cohort 1 was implemented, both STEP and AFS have agreed upon a timeline which allows for information sessions across 21 governorates in collaboration with the MOE, in addition to information sessions for parents and sessions held in coordination with the National Council of Women (NCW). Home visits will be conducted for all applicants before the month of Ramadan.
5. **MOE endorsement of outreach and collaboration on information sessions** – this was addressed in detail in the program highlights section at the beginning of this report.

HEI STEM Undergraduate Scholarship–Revised selection criteria

- Egyptian citizenship.
- Thanweya Amma certificate from public (governmental), official languages (experimental), Azhari, or charity schools (graduates from private schools, private languages, international, or national academies are not eligible).
- Thanaweya Amma diploma to be obtained in 2014 or 2015 with a total average of no less than 90% as well as an average in science or mathematics of no less than 90% or Egyptian Secondary Diploma in Science and Technology with a grade of no less than 85% in each of the science and mathematics subjects.

- Active participation in community and volunteer activities.
- Evidence of applicant's financial need.
- Acceptable English language level, evidenced by the submission of a valid score in TOEFL ITP test of not less than 450 (39 in TOEFL IBT or 4.0 in IELTS). Test score must have been obtained no earlier than March 2013.
- Desire to study in a STEM related field.

Printed Materials and USAID Branding:

During the period of November 2014–February 2015, the STEP team worked closely with the USAID Department of Communications (DOC) and the COR to obtain approvals for program related outreach materials which included brochures, flyers, posters, newspaper advertisements, and roll ups. Delays in the official HEI launch held up the process significantly, in addition to approval to use the new HEI logo prior to the official launch; however by late January 2015, STEP received all necessary approvals and launched its outreach efforts on February 6, 2015.

Feedback and comments collected throughout cohorts 1 outreach activities through social media, inquiry emails, and cohort 1 participants helped STEP to restructure and revise printed materials to ensure the information is clearer for scholarship applicants. In addition, a more comprehensive set of FAQs were developed.

The following materials were printed for cohort 2 of the STEM undergraduate scholarships for distribution through AFS and its network of chapters and partner NGOs across the governorates as well as during information sessions. STEP also sent brochures and flyers to the Ministry of Education. In addition, roll-ups were printed and used during information sessions.

- 100 posters (Size: A3)
- 2,000 brochures (Size: folding A4)
- 5,000 flyers (Size: A5)
- 4 Roll up banners for use during information sessions.

Information Sessions:

To facilitate its reach to public schools, STEP requested and obtained, on November 19, 2014, CO's approval to reimburse travel allowances, in accordance with STEP's travel policy, to Ministry of Education representatives when accompanying STEP's teams to info sessions in public schools at various governorates. Over the life of the project, the total travel allowances for MOE representatives must not exceed \$6,188.

Information sessions for STEM cohort 2 were conducted between February 7 and March 10, 2015, in partnership with the MOE and partner AFS. Sessions were conducted as follows:

- MOE sessions in collaboration with STEP and/or AFS: 18 sessions held from February 7–March 1, 2015. All logistics related to the MOE information sessions including lodging, transportation, scheduling and staff coordination were handled internally by the STEP Outreach and Recruitment Specialist. Bound by a tight schedule to avoid school visits during the mid-term break, all sessions were completed by March 1 to allow candidates to complete applications, prepare necessary documents, and take the TOEFL ITP exam before the March 15 deadline.
- AFS sessions: Total 32 (eight in collaboration with the MOE and 24 through AFS team members).

- STEP project: 10 in total, 9 sessions by STEP plus one delivered by MOE team in Matrouh. *(Please see Annex 1 for a list of sessions held by date, location and pictures).*

Advertisements and Social Media:

The STEM scholarship opportunity was also advertised in the Al Ahram newspaper on two occasions (February 13 and March 1, 2015) in addition to the following social media initiatives:

- Announcements on partner website: AFS for Cultural Exchanges on which the STEM cohort 2 application was available in PDF format in addition to a digital brochure and the FAQs.
- STEP Facebook page advertising the HEI STEM and MBA scholarships as well as providing up-to-date information on selection process, and responses to candidate questions / inquiries. By March 31, 2015, total page “likes” had reached more than 3,200.
- Postings on the AFS Facebook page as well as their Alumni group and Facebook pages of partner chapters across the governorates.
- Announcement posted on the US Embassy Facebook page and Twitter account.
- Scholarship brochures were distributed to partners, at information sessions, as well to the Ministry of Education.

b. STEM Recruitment and Selection Process

The STEM cohort 2 recruitment and selection process consists of the following phases. For the time frame of this reporting period, only phases 1 and 2 are addressed:

1. **Phase 1: Revision of the application and scoring rubric**
2. **Phase 2: Review and scoring of applications**
3. Phase 3: Individual interviews
4. Phase 4: Home visits
5. Phase 5: AUC Placement test
6. Phase 6: Final selection camp
7. Phase 7: Identification of finalists

Phase 1: Revision of the application and scoring rubric:

Several meetings were held with AFS to revise the cohort 1 applications and make edits in accordance with lessons learned and the newly revised selection criteria. On January 12, 2015, USAID provided its approval of the HEI STEM undergraduate application.

On February 5, 2015, AFS made available online the STEM-II application which was posted in PDF format. The applicants were required to print, complete the form, and send a full set of required documents by mail to the AFS post office box noted in the advertisements, brochure and website. On behalf of STEP, AFS then received and catalogued the applications.

The deadline to submit the cohort 2 STEM undergraduate scholarship application was March 15, 2015. However, due to unforeseen circumstances related to AMIDEAST’s temporary closure of TOEFL testing centers in governorates outside Cairo, Beni Suef, Mansourah, and Alexandria, applicants from the other governorates were granted an extension on the submission of TOEFL ITP test scores until March 31, 2015, to allow applicants extra time to take the test at one of the AMIDEAST’s available centers. *(Please refer to the “Challenges” section regarding the closing of the AMIDEAST certified testing centers).*

Phase 2 – Review and scoring of applications:

The AFS and STEP team worked closely to further refine the application scoring rubric to provide a most appropriate weighting for each category. The team redesigned the financial information section to ensure the targeting of candidates from underserved backgrounds.

Given the extension granted for submission of the TOEFL ITP scores, the scoring of applications along with the remaining phases of recruitment and selection will be covered in the next progress report.

E. HEI MBA Scholarship – Cohort 2

a. MBA Outreach Process

Outreach and recruitment planning for MBA cohort 2 began in September 2014 as noted in the previous progress report. On September 17, 2014, after the completion of recruitment activities for cohort 1, STEP held a planning and lessons learned meeting with the EFE CEO. The objective of the meeting was to discuss all lessons learned as noted by both teams, agree on areas of improvement, and discuss next steps prior to launching cohort 2 activities. The meeting was very productive and revealed that EFE has in fact benefited from the capacity building and mentoring approach followed by the STEP team and demonstrated a good understanding of the outreach and recruitment activities, rationale, and processes. Overall, it was a mutually beneficial learning experience for both EFE and STEP team members.

Additional meetings with EFE were held in October and November to further refine the digitization of the application and scoring rubric. In addition, planning meetings were held with EFE and NM in December 2014 and January 2015 to effectively communicate the revised outreach approach for cohort 2. STEP aimed to focus outreach efforts to encourage young professionals and working women in general to apply for the MBA scholarships.

MBA–Revised selection criteria

- Egyptian citizenship.
- Thanweya Amma certificate from public (governmental), official languages (experimental), Azhari, or charity schools (graduates from private schools, private languages, international, or national academies are not eligible).
- University degree with a minimum cumulative grade of Good from a government university.
- Active participation in community and volunteer activities.
- Evidence of applicant's financial need.
- Acceptable English language level, evidenced by the submission of a valid TOEFL ITP score test of no less than 450 (39 in IBT TOEFL or 4.0 in IELTS). Test score must have been obtained no earlier than March 2013.
- Desire to study for an MBA degree.

Printed Material and Branding:

During the period of November 2014–February 2015, the STEP team worked closely with the USAID Department of Communications (DOC) and the COR to obtain approvals for program related outreach materials

which included brochures, newspaper advertisements and banners. Delays in the official HEI launch held up the process significantly as approval to use the new HEI logo prior to the official HEI launch was put on hold. Eventually, in late January 2015, STEP received all necessary approvals for printed materials for both scholarships.

The following materials were printed for cohort 2 of the MBA scholarship for distribution through EFE as well as through NM and its network of partner NGOs across the governorates. The outreach materials were also used in information sessions. In addition, roll-ups were printed and used during information sessions.

- 4,000 brochures (Size: folding A4)
- 4 Roll up banners for use in information sessions.

Information Sessions

In partnership with NM and EFE, STEP conducted 17 information sessions across 13 governorates. *(Please see Annex 9 for a list of the 17 sessions and their locations).*

The information sessions were held through NM and EFE's partner NGOs in each region and were led by an NM or EFE staff member. The STEP Outreach and Recruitment Specialist accompanied the partner representatives when possible. The sessions consisted of a presentation followed by a lengthy question and answer period to explain the HEI MBA scholarship opportunity to potential candidates, encourage participation, and answer questions. *(Please see annex10 for session pictures).*

Advertisement and Social Media

In addition to the information sessions, the MBA scholarship opportunity was advertised in the Al Ahram newspaper on February 19 and March 27, 2015. The following social media initiatives were also launched:

- Announcements on partners' websites: NM and EFE.
- STEP Facebook page advertising the academic scholarships as well as providing up to date details on information sessions, selection process, as well as responses to candidate questions / inquiries. Through March 31, 2015, over 3,200 page "likes" were posted.
- Postings on the NM and EFE Facebook pages as well as the EFE Alumni group and Facebook pages of partner organizations.
- An information email was set up by STEP to respond to candidate inquiries and concerns.

TOEFL ITP Testing

During the second week of March 2015, as a result of applicant feedback both on social media and at the information sessions that had been conducted to date, the STEP project was alerted to sudden changes made by AMIDEAST to the temporary closure of TOEFL ITP testing centers in governorates outside Cairo, Beni Suef, Mansourah, and Alexandria. *(Please refer to the "Challenges" section for more details).*

TOEFL ITP test scores, obtained at any AMIDEAST partner location since March 2013, are considered valid.

The STEP team recognized that this clearly presents an issue for candidates from remote, underserved governorates to fulfill the TOEFL ITP requirement for application to the MBA scholarship, and poses a financial burden on the targeted applicants who could not afford the added cost of traveling to the approved locations for testing. To quickly remedy this constraint, STEP organized a planning meeting with AMIDEAST representatives

and STEP's partner, NM, to reach a solution that relieves additional burden on the applicants. These discussions resulted in the consensus to establish a service agreement between AMIDEAST and NM to provide special testing sessions for MBA scholarship applicants from outside the governorates where testing centers are available. These sessions would be scheduled in parallel to the STEP group activity session in early May 2015. Before adopting this approach, STEP consulted with the COR on March 16 and obtained her consent to proceed.

Holding special TOEFL testing sessions for MBA applicants after the April 15 deadline affected the recruitment process as follows:

- Candidates submit applications by the April 15 deadline as originally stipulated; however any applicant from outside Cairo, Alexandria, Beni Suef or Mansourah is allowed to submit an application without the TOEFL ITP test score.
- Once the applications are reviewed and scored by the STEP team and its partners, a short list of candidates is established. The short-listed applicants from outside of the four locations noted above will be required to sit for the TOEFL ITP test at AMIDEAST-Cairo, during their trip to participate in the group activity camp.
- The STEP and NM team will provide AMIDEAST with a list of candidates to be tested and will arrange special testing sessions to accommodate the applicants accordingly.
- Similarly to their colleagues, applicants will only cover the cost of the test, while STEP covers the travel and accommodation costs of applicants attending the group activity session.
- Any applicant that had already taken the TOEFL ITP earlier at any of the accredited locations will not be required to attend testing in Cairo.

The STEP team and partners NM and EFE notified applicants of this revision to the process through email shots, social media and information sessions.

b. MBA–Recruitment and Selection Process

The MBA recruitment and selection process for cohort 2 consists of the following phases. For the time frame of this reporting period, only phase 1 is addressed:

- 1. Phase 1: Revision of the application and scoring rubric;**
2. Phase 2: Review and scoring of applications;
3. Phase 3: Group activity camp;
4. Phase 4: Individual Interviews;
5. Phase 5: AUC Placement test;
6. Phase 6: Identification of finalists

Phase 1: Revision of the application and scoring rubric

The STEP team worked closely with the EFE management to make significant changes to the MBA online application for cohort 2. The online interface changed entirely, allowing the STEP and EFE review team easier access to candidate information, navigation between sections, filtering of candidates according to criteria, streamlining supporting document uploads and additional fields for candidate financial reporting. In addition, the new application interface does not allow for submission with incomplete fields, thus ensuring the applicants provide all the necessary information prior to review by the team. In addition, the revised interface allows the review teams to monitor in real time, the number of candidates from different governorates and the status of each candidate in the application process.

As regards to the scoring rubric, significant effort was dedicated to ensuring that the online application interface corresponds in full with the application weighting rubric developed by IIE. To ensure that all reviewers fully understand the interface and how the weighting of each section is calculated, the EFE and STEP team conducted, on March 17, 2015, a joint orientation workshop at the IIE premises. The workshop was co-facilitated by the EFE Project Manager and the IIE STEP Outreach and Recruitment Specialist. It was attended by the entire STEP program team. Several issues were detected during the orientation session, and the EFE Program Manager took note of the changes required. The STEP team began real time testing of the application review online, and reported feedback to EFE to address issues/bugs faced. IIE will be able to review applications in parallel to online submission of applications in an effort to complete the scoring process by the end of April 2015.

EFE also conducted an orientation session at their premises for the three EFE team members dedicated full time for the application review process.

Application review results as well as reporting on the remaining five phases of the recruitment and selection process will be addressed in the next progress report.

F. Technical Assistance Initiatives

During this reporting period, STEP started working on technical assistance and training requests received from the Health, Education, and Democracy and Governance USAID technical offices. During the period of December 2014-March 2015, several coordination meetings were held with the COR and the assigned technical offices representatives to define scopes of work and logistics details.

The following is a summary of the activities covered during this period:

a. Early Grade Reading (EGR) STTA–MOE Basic Education

In the previous progress report, STEP outlined in detail the progress in the Early Grade Reading (EGR) technical assistance implemented by Keys for Effective Learning. The objectives of this assistance consisted of providing support and building the capacity of the EGR unit at the Ministry of Education, Muderiya, and Idara levels to be able to plan, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of the early grade reading training.

As of September 30, 2014 the following tasks were accomplished:

1. Development of a set of criteria for the evaluation of training plans.
2. Evaluation of training plans based on previously developed criteria.
3. Finalizing effective, timely, and realistic training plans for the 27 governorates.
4. Development of effective, timely, and realistic training monitoring and follow up plans that align with the training plans.
5. Establishment of criteria for evaluating the training materials.
6. Recommendations were collected and reported to the EGR unit for improving EGR training materials.

On October 20, 2014, a meeting was held with COR, Jana Wooden, Education Specialist, Hala El Serafy, and Keys Program Manager, Randa Gaber, to update USAID on the progress of the EGR STTA. The following accomplishments were highlighted by Randa Gaber:

1. A workshop was held in Cairo for the 27 EGR governorate coordinators. Mrs. Hanaa Kasem, Head of the MOE EGR unit also attended.

2. Keys gathered the coordinators' feedback regarding the rubric used for evaluating teacher training and, based on comments received, made revisions to the rubric to adjust the weighting of the criteria and edit the language to be more user-friendly.
3. Keys finalized a tool to create and evaluate training plans; it was reviewed by the 27 MOE coordinators and is since being used.
4. Keys built the capacity of the EGR governorate coordinators by enabling them to create effective, timely and realistic training plans. It further built the capacity of two main staff members working with Ms. Hanaa at the central MOE unit on the training plans evaluation tool. As a result, the two staff members began using effective techniques for following up with the governorate coordinators.
5. The coordinators are now able to establish criteria for evaluating training programs and are aware of what to look for when evaluating training.
6. The Keys team attended five teacher training sessions in Marsa Matrouh, South Sinai, Luxor, Dakhalia and Qalyoubia and noted the following observations which were also included in the final report submitted to USAID:
 - Gaps in the abilities of trainers to implement the EGR training programs.
 - The most qualified trainers are those originally trained under the USAID funded GILO project.
 - When trainers attend refresher programs, they basically attend the same training program they had previously attended, without the availability of new material.
 - Training rooms were at times inadequately equipped for training, therefore making it difficult for trainees to attend full training days.
7. Teacher and participant training manuals were not readily available; there is a shortage in such resources. The following are some recommendations made by Keys as additional follow up tasks that would be relevant to this STTA. These have also been included in the final report to USAID:
 - Develop visual kits to be used by the trainers, kept in the governorates.
 - Update or design new materials for trainers (TOT manual).
 - Design refresher training program and materials, building upon the initial EGR training received. Since it is mandated by the MOE EGR unit that teachers attend refresher training, it would be more effective that the refresher content provide additional information instead of reiteration of the initial training provided.
 - Adjust the training days according to the course content, as participants are complaining that the four-day courses are delivered in three days with the same amount of content.
 - EGR manuals require editing to the technical content as per Keys' recommendations.
 - Field visits to classrooms were requested by Ms. Hanaa Kasem; however, Keys clarified that any requests for additional tasks outside the scope of this STTA should be directed to USAID.

On November 9-10, 2014, a two-day workshop was held to build the capacity of the 27 MOE Muderyia coordinators and the central EGR unit in effectively using the new training monitoring and evaluation tool, enhancing their ability to provide constructive feedback, and analyzing the results of the follow up, using tools developed through the STTA. Furthermore, the sessions helped in building the EGR team's capacity in utilizing the analysis results to propose recommendations as well as to suggest plan improvements.

The following are additional testimonials from MOE representatives expressing their views on the assistance provided:

1. *“These meetings helped build my skills in evaluating training materials.”* Mr. Hussien Mohamed, Idara EGR Coordinator.
2. *“The sessions were very well organized and the time management was effective, which enabled us to finish the task on time.”* Ms. Howyida Ahmed, Head of the MOE EGR Unit.
3. *“I like the fact that we became a team. I wish we can have an extension and there will be more activities that allow us do more work with Keys.”* Ms. Safaa Ezat, Central MOE EGR Unit.
4. *“All thanks and appreciation for this meaningful and useful training. It honestly improved my work. Now I can evaluate the training and trainers through effective and clear criteria, which we were provided with through the project. I am thankful to the session facilitators, planners, and organizers.”* Gamal Fathy, Marsa Matrouh MOE Governorate Coordinator
5. *“I want to thank USAID and the program team for their support during the workshop. I am now able to use the training monitoring and evaluation tool, and report on findings. In the end, I wish more success to the project staff, everyone has benefited from them. They modeled effective teamwork for all of us.”* Rafaat Ahmed, Wadi El Gadid MOE Governorate Coordinator.
6. *“The training was beneficial. I learned more a lot about effective training. The Keys team provided a great sample of what a great training looks like and hopefully I can transfer what I experienced to EGR training at my governorate.”* Gamila Mohamed , Suez MOE Governorate Coordinator
7. *“Thank you very much for the warm reception and excellent organization, and excellent training content. The agenda was organized in an excellent way and every minute was used effectively. Also, the training was implemented by highly skilled trainers/facilitators.”* Rasha Eissa, Red Sea MOE Governorate Coordinator
8. *“I want to thank those in charge of the program. It was a wonderful and fruitful training. It was highly beneficial and will help us improve the EGR Program.”* Mohamed Saasa, Port Said MOE Governorate Coordinator.

On January 27, 2015, STEP submitted a final report on the activity. *(Please see Annex 11 for a copy of the report).*

b. Youth and Adult Literacy Assessment

During this reporting period, activities continued with the Youth and Adult Literacy assessment requested by the USAID Education Technical Office. It consists in assessing Egypt’s youth and adult literacy needs, ongoing Government of Egypt (GOE) assistance, donor and non-governmental organization (NGO) programs; and best practices and gaps. In addition, the study should assess the capacity building needs of the Community Education Department (CED) under the MOE and the Adult Education Authority (AEA) as well as the capacity of the Community Schools and their potential of hosting Adult Literacy programs.

During the month of September 2014, two meetings were held at the AEA premises and attended by USAID COR Jana Wooden, Career Development and Consultancy Academy (CDC) representative, Ms. Mariam Ghazala, STEP COP and DCOP, the previous Head of the AEA, Dr. Moheb El Rafaie, and members of his team. Throughout these meetings, USAID, CDC and AEA discussed in detail the objectives, expected outcomes, and main areas of focus of this assessment.

Between October and December 2014, the STEP team worked with CDC, USAID and AEA on refining the assignment and establishing an acceptable budget. On December 16, a follow up meeting was held at the AEA premises attended by USAID representative, Samah Eid, STEP, CDC, AEA Head, Dr. Moheb El Rafaie, along with other AEA team members.

The purpose of the meeting was to reiterate in detail the objectives of the assessment and its implementation process including the proposed timeline and logistics. The results were the following recommendations:

1. Prepare a matrix including all the community schools, their needs and their capabilities.
2. The field visits will include schools in poor, moderate and well-to-do areas.
3. The draft report will be discussed with AEA before final submission to USAID.
4. Planned start date for the visits is Jan 15, 2015, and the estimated timeline for the study is 70 days.
5. AEA to revise and stamp the questionnaires developed by CDC before using them in the field.

Dr. Moheb assigned Mr. Adel Nadeem, as a facilitator to prepare a plan for visiting schools and NGOs. He also assigned Dr. Wafaa Zatar, Mr. Raed Heikel and Mr. Mohamed Afifi to provide CDC with the required data and statistics.

On January 11, 2015, a meeting was held at AEA, in the presence of USAID representatives, Jana Wooden and Samah Eid, as well as the STEP COP and Professional Development and Technical Assistance Program Manager. The following points were discussed and clarified by USAID:

1. The assessment study will serve as a base for USAID to identify areas of support. The mechanism to be used for such support will also be determined at the time.
 - The funding source for such assistance will be the funds agreed upon in the Bilateral Agreement executed in late September by both the US and GOE governments.
 - The funds mainly cover three areas: basic, adult and vocational education.
2. For consultation purposes, AEA will use internal experts and will not hire any outside or university experts.
3. During the field visits, only AEA and CED representatives will accompany the CDC team.
4. USAID will not be responsible for any additional expenses related to AEA and CED accompanying the CDC team.
5. The study should take into consideration gender requirements.
6. CDC develops and AEA approves the tools to be used during the study.

The Performance Solution request was signed by USAID on January 15, 2015.

On Feb 2, 2015, another coordination meeting was held at the AEA and was attended by USAID representative, Samah Eid, AEA Head Dr. Moheb El Rifaie, various AEA department heads, Acting Head of the MOE CED, Mr. Farag El Shaer, and the CDC and STEP team. The following issues were addressed:

1. Dr. Moheb, the CDC and STEP team explained to the AEA department heads and the MOE CED the objectives of the study, the methodology to be used, and timeline.
2. CDC explained the instruments; it was agreed that both the AEA and CED would review and provide feedback.
3. CDC was asked to develop an additional questionnaire for students.
4. AEA recommended a workshop be held on Feb. 11 to brief the governorate branch managers before the actual field visits, on the purpose of the visits and the methodology for data collection.
5. AEA requested that five of their staff members attend the data analysis phase at CDC as a capacity building effort.
6. AEA and CED will work together on identifying the appropriate locations to be visited by CDC. AEA will send a final schedule to CDC identifying schools and NGOs in poor, moderate, and well-to-do areas.

As recommended above, a workshop was held on February 11 at AEA, headed by Mr. Mohamed Afifi, Deputy Director, and attended by AEA governorate branch managers, department heads, Mr. Shaer, Acting Head of the MOE CED, CED governorate heads, STEP and CDC. CDC and STEP explained the study, its purpose, the methodology and timeline, as well as what is expected from the AEA and MOE CED representatives.

A follow up meeting was held on March 1, 2015, at AEA. It was attended by USAID representatives, Jana Wooden and Samah Eid, Mr. Mohamed Afifi of AEA, AEA department heads, STEP and CDC representatives. The following issues were addressed:

1. Security clearance received for Cairo, Beheira and Luxor. Remaining clearances to be granted a week prior to each of the remaining visits.
2. Criteria to define AEA's Learning Centers and NGOs were developed as follows:
 - AEA's Learning Centers include all centers fully managed by AEA or centers where a teacher/administrator requests AEA to launch an adult learning activity, in which case, the following takes place:
 - The teacher is tested by AEA for his/her teaching skills.
 - The teacher is provided with AEA's training.
 - Either the teacher/administrator proposes a venue to conduct the adult teaching or AEA finds such a location.
 - NGO centers fall under the following categories:
 - The NGO decides where to open and conduct the teaching.
 - AEA provides the NGOs with the teaching curriculum (or the curriculum must be adopted by AEA).
 - The NGOs manage and administer the centers in partnership with AEA.
3. Any adult learning curriculum must be approved and accredited by the AEA.

In an effort to continue effective communication with the MOE CED team, a meeting with Mr. Mohamed Medhat, Head of the MOE Central Administration for Drop Outs and Mr. Farag El Shaer, Acting Head of the MOE CED, was held on March 4, 2015, at MOE. It was attended by USAID representatives, Jana Wooden and Samah Eid, as well as the STEP team. STEP and USAID explained to Mr. El Shaer and Mr. Medhat the history of the assessment study and how it is intended to serve as a base for USAID to identify areas of support. They also explained that the mechanism to be used for such support will be determined later, based on the results of the assessment. It was agreed that Mr. El Shaer will be coordinating directly with STEP and the AEA for the rest of the assignment.

On March 5, 2015, STEP received the CO's approval for Ministry of Education representatives to be reimbursed for travel allowances according to STEP's travel policy when accompanying STEP teams on visits to governorates to facilitate on-going activities. Throughout the life of the project, the travel allowances for MOE's representatives must not exceed a total of \$5,000. This allowance is in addition to the earlier approved \$6,188 travel allowance for MOE's representatives who would be accompanying STEP's teams in their outreach efforts to recruit students for the HEI undergraduate scholarships in STEM.

c. Mid-term Evaluation of University Career Development Centers (CDC)

On February 23, 2015, STEP received a request from USAID for a mid-term evaluation to determine if the CDC supported by USAID funding through World Learning and the AUC are achieving the intended objectives and if the initiative merits expansion into new public universities. The mid-term evaluation will also provide actionable recommendations of any mid-course corrections. The evaluation will further analyze the effectiveness of the

CDCs and, if warranted, recommend the best geographic regions in Egypt for future CDCs. Estimated to take approximately two months, the evaluation is expected to begin in June 2015 and end by July 31, 2015.

To date, CDCs have been supported in the following locations:

1. University of Fayoum (substituted by Helwan) – World Learning
2. South Valley, Qena – World Learning
3. Port Said (suspended since November 2014) – World Learning
4. Suez Canal, Ismailia – AUC
5. Ain Shams University (2 Centers) – AUC
6. Assiut University (Closed) - AUC

On March 2, the STEP team attended an initial meeting with Wafaa El Adawy, USAID Project Management Specialist, Arturo Acosta, USAID Education Officer, and Jana Wooden, COR. The following issues were discussed:

1. Main objective: the projects started in 2012 for a period of three years, each. Due to the USG ordered evacuation, all activities in both projects were suspended during the period of October 2012-March 2013. As a result of the temporary shut-down of operations, USAID believes the evaluators will be unable to determine the success of the projects based on their end results, i.e., whether beneficiaries got more jobs, better jobs or jobs more quickly. Other indicators to determine success will have to be developed (such as number of students enrolling in courses at CDCs, etc.).
2. The evaluation would cover the following components:
 - Recommendations for mid-term corrections.
 - Recommendation on whether USAID should continue supporting current CDCs, invest in additional (possibly six) or just close the projects.
 - Best geographic areas for future CDCs, if recommended.
 - Reasons behind the closure and suspension of CDCs.
 - Identification of other public universities, if any, that have CDCs or similar functions under different departments or names (as an example, Cairo University had two CDCs partly funded by USAID. Both centers are now closed. Interesting statistics to keep into consideration: 80% of graduates do not get jobs.
 - Engagement level of the implementing partners (AUC and WL) in establishing and managing the CDCs in each university.

In cooperation with Ms. El Adawy, STEP completed the PSRF and submitted it on March 19, 2015, to USAID for approval.

Further reporting on this activity will be included in the next progress report.

d. Market Research/Assessment of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Working on Combatting Violence Against Women (VAW) and/or Gender Based Violence (GBV)

On March 2, 2015, the USAID Democracy and Governance (DG) Technical Office requested a market study on organizations working in the areas of Violence Against Women (VAW) and/or Gender Based Violence (GBV). This rapid assessment will research the capable entrants into the USAID market and find the most effective sponsors of appropriate programs.

The overall objective of this assessment is to identify the 10-12 most viable organizations that would be interested in submitting proposals for USAID funding that covers activities focusing on prevention of GBV and/or VAW as well as services to victims of VAW and GBV, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), among other issues related to violence against women. USAID intends to use the list identified by the market research/assessment to seek proposals from CSOs which are most effective in their communities and capable to create a network of organizations in support of VAW and GBV issues.

USAID emphasized on the turnaround urgency of this assessment with a final deliverable to be submitted by mid-April 2015. On March 15, 2015, USAID approved the PSRF. Through STEP's partner, NM, two Subject Matter Experts (SME) were quickly identified. On Sunday, March 22, a meeting was held at USAID with USAID representatives, Taly Lind, Deputy Director of the DG Technical Office, Jana Wooden, COR, members of the STEP team and the two SMEs. The following issues were discussed:

1. USAID recently approved a new contracting mechanism which allows a limited number of organizations to compete for a local grant.
2. DG indicated that through the assessment, they hope to get a better picture of the areas in which organizations/entities are currently working and are addressing as areas of importance. This will help define the RFA. The objective is to ensure as much as possible the integration of USAID assistance with the areas organizations indicate as high priority.
3. Since 2011, several organizations began working in the area of GBV. Therefore, the 33 organizations mentioned in the "Combat Violence Against Women evaluation report" are only a starting point; the assessment should not be restricted to this list.
4. The organizations/entities identified through the assessment must comply with the minimum requirements noted in the ADS for eligibility to receive USAID funding. Specifically, the organization must be a "Legal Entity" that can accept funds and has a bank account.
5. The USAID/DG technical office is looking at how to connect with the overall GBV strategy being implemented in Egypt through other donors and partners. It would be greatly beneficial to identify organizations that are already working with such partners and can therefore build upon and/or compliment already existing initiatives.
6. One of the main gaps identified by USAID is that of "Accompanying Services". Essentially this is a trained individual who can be a companion to a GBV victim and is capable of leading them through the GBV chain. It would be an added value if the technical experts identify organizations that are already working in this area or have expressed an interest to work in this area. This could, for example, require training and certification of volunteers who could then serve as companions in various communities. The objective is to have these companions through the organizations play a proactive role in reaching out to victims as opposed to the victims being in the difficult situation of having to seek assistance.
7. Since DG will be working on the RFA in parallel with the assessment, they would like to be in contact with the SMEs throughout the process to ensure that the RFA is consistent with the findings and not being drafted in isolation of the current landscape. DG confirmed that the RFA will not be finalized until the results of the assessment are received.
8. STEP requested clarification on the status of the two SMEs potentially working with these organizations during the implementation of the award. DG clarified that, although they would like to receive official

confirmation from the procurement office, their initial response is that the SMEs cannot assist the organizations in writing their proposals for the grant, nor can they assist USAID in helping draft the solicitation, but they see no conflict if they are involved in post award implementation. However, on March 25, the COR informed STEP that further consultations at USAID determined that the SMEs cannot be involved in post-award project implementation. Through NM, STEP communicated this decision to the SMEs who opted to pursue working on the market research.

9. The SMEs asked if, during post-award grant implementation, it is permissible for the organizations not to publicize having received USAID funding. DG indicated that, if this is a concern to organizations, it should be noted in the assessment; in any case, such requests can be handled through the granting of a “Branding Waiver” if USAID-approved conditions prevail.
10. It is foreseen that funding will not exceed \$750,000 as this is the ceiling of the USAID FOG contracting mechanism which is expected to be used for this grant. Funding is expected to extend for two-to-three years and the program is expected to begin in Fall 2015.
11. DG confirmed that, if an organization has a good reputation and is technically capable but has no experience in handling large grants, it should still be considered given that USAID has internal capacity building programs that can be used to help organizations in areas of weakness (such as M&E and Financial reporting). USAID is focused mainly on the technical capacity of the organizations and their reach in the communities; lesser on their financial capabilities. Limited financial strength is helpful to note in the assessment report, but should not be a reason to exclude an organization. Past experience in receiving funding from donors could be used only as an indicator but not a pre-requisite.
12. Organizations that have been independently audited during any of the last three years is a good indicator but not a pre-requisite for consideration.
13. SMEs are requested to include, whenever possible, strengths and weaknesses of each organization recommended in their report.
14. When conducting the assessment, USAID requires full transparency in communicating to the organizations the main objective of the assessment, i.e., USAID’s plan to release an RFA in the area of GBV/VAW.
15. Due to the extreme time constraints to complete this assignment, the SMEs expressed their concern on the request to validate findings with beneficiaries. DG indicated this was more of a STEP request, rather than USAID. It was agreed by all that input from beneficiaries would be obtained whenever possible and feasible.
16. Currently, there are no specific regions identified for assistance, this will also depend largely on the results of the assessment. The objective is to identify organizations that have reach and will be able to potentially award sub-grants to other partners in communities to provide services:
 - UNFPA is currently working in Assiut, Sohague and Cairo on training of hospital workers to respond to and give guidance to victims. Therefore, these may be regions to start in given that there is already assistance on the ground.
 - Furthermore, ACT through British funding is working to provide a one-stop shop judicial support for victims in pursuing legal/prosecutorial actions.

17. Organizations that are currently receiving funding from UN Women can be considered among the short-listed entities.
18. The deliverable for this assessment is a list of 10-12 eligible organizations with a one-to-two page justification for each. USAID would then use these results to issue an RFA to a limited pool of organizations.
19. DG asked the SMEs to share with them tools and templates to be used throughout the assessment so they can provide input when appropriate. By March 23, the SMEs had shared with USAID a list of criteria to be used for the selection of organizations as well as the assessment tools to be used.
20. Given the Easter holidays, the SMEs will do their best to complete the assignment as agreed by April 15; however, USAID will understand if there is a one-to-two day delay.

On March 25, 2015, USAID requested STEP to temporarily suspend activities under this assignment until further notice.

e. Training Needs Assessment (TNA) for Priority Ministries–Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE)

On Feb 12, 2015, STEP received a request from the USAID Education Technical Office to conduct a TNA for eight priority ministries listed below, towards building their capacity in the following technical priority STEM fields: energy, water, health, agriculture, and ICT, as well as in recommended soft skills.

1. Ministry of Environment
2. Ministry of Scientific Research
3. Ministry of Electricity and Energy
4. Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation
5. Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
6. Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation
7. Ministry of Health
8. The Central Department of Missions (CDM) at the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE)

The principal components of the assessment consist of the following:

1. Review the already expressed needs of the ministries/departments.
2. Build on the expressed needs and identify institutional skill gaps in the following priority areas: energy, water, health, agriculture, and ICT.
3. Recommend training solutions for the identified gaps.
4. Recommend a list of training providers for each solution.

The assessment is estimated to begin in May 2015 and is expected to be completed in 2 months. STEP is working with US-based partners, AGC and KNO, as well as local partner, CDC.

In cooperation with DO/Education, a PSRF was completed and submitted on March 19, 2015, to USAID for approval.

G. Professional Development/Training Initiatives

a. VHU Training

On February 22, 2015, STEP received an initial request from the USAID Health Technical Office to provide training logistics for a series of programs aiming at combating the spread of Hepatitis C. These programs constitute a part of a comprehensive plan developed by the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) with the assistance of USAID. The MOHP has been identified as the key implementer of the work plan, through the newly established Viral Hepatitis Unit (VHU) located at the MOHP. Assistance in building the capacity of the VHU will be provided through an inter-agency consortium wherein USAID/Egypt plans to partner with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to support Egypt's National Hepatitis Program. As a result, subject matter experts from CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis will provide technical support and capacity building to the VHU and other national and subnational entities. To achieve this goal, CDC will implement a series of trainings, workshops and conferences targeting key personnel from those entities.

On March 3, a planning meeting was held at USAID and attended by COR, Jana Wooden, USAID Senior Program Manager, Dr. Akmal Elerian, Program Management Specialist, Ms. Nada Nassef, and the STEP team. The following issues were discussed:

1. The STEP team will work with the USAID Health Technical Office to finalize assistance in covering the interventions through September 2015.
2. The first training intervention will be on April 5-8, in Cairo. Future interventions will be scheduled at a later date.
3. Indicators of success: Dr. Akmal Elerian explained that indicators should focus primarily on process level (program logistics) as opposed to the impact of the technical training, given that the role of the STEP project will be limited to facilitating logistics for the training interventions.

A PSR-T was developed and signed by USAID on March 10, 2015.

Until March 31, 2015, STEP worked closely with the USAID Health Technical Office, MOHP and CDC representatives on all logistical arrangements and requirements for the workshop.

b. EDHS Dissemination

On March 18, 2015, STEP received an initial request from USAID Office of Health to provide logistical support to hold a one-day workshop in each of four governorates for the dissemination of the results generated from the 2014 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey. The workshops are scheduled to be held in May-June 2015 in yet to be identified governorates. Since, STEP and the Health Office have been working together to complete the necessary documentation for this activity, including a PSR-T.

c. Early Grade Learning Training of Teachers

On March 23, 2015, STEP received an initial request for an Early Grade Learning activity consisting of training teachers in Early Grade Reading and Mathematics. In addition, through the cascaded model, reach all EGL teachers in Egypt. A meeting was held on March 30 at USAID in the presence of the COR, Jana Wooden, Education Specialist, Hala El Serafy, and the STEP team to further discuss this request and complete a PSR-T.

IV. Deliverables

During the reporting period, STEP submitted the following deliverables:

1. Accruals report with a pipeline analysis on December 14, 2014
2. Accruals report with a pipeline analysis on March 15, 2015

In addition, STEP submitted on January 27, 2015, a final report for the STTA provided to the EGR unit at MOE.

V. Administrative

- **Data Quality Assurance (DQA) Audit, USAID** – On November 10, 2014, USAID COR, Jana Wooden, and Participant Training Specialist, Samah Eid, visited the IIE STEP office to meet with the STEP Outreach and Recruitment Specialist Lamiaa Negm El Din. The purpose of the visit was to conduct a DQA audit on the following:
 - Data collection practices
 - Participant Recruitment and Selection process
 - Supporting documentation for each phase of the MBA and STEM outreach, recruitment and selection.

Random checks were conducted on files and records to ensure that the process outlined by STEP has been followed as agreed upon and approved by USAID. Afterwards, Jana Wooden indicated that STEP is in full compliance and has demonstrated accurate and detailed processes and documentation of project activities.

- **Visit of STEP's Project Director and Competencies and Strategic Planning Training** - On November 8, 2014, US-based STEP's Project Director and IIE's Director of Participant Training Programs, Susan Fickling, arrived in Cairo for meetings with the STEP project team and partners, as well as to conduct training for IIE staff on core competencies. Training was held from November 16-20 and included competencies training sessions instructed by Susan Fickling and strategic planning sessions facilitated by IIE Regional Director, Susan Silveus.

During the week prior to the training, Ms. Fickling met with STEP partners, NM and CDC, as well as the STEP project team to welcome staff and review progress to date. Furthermore, on November 12, Ms. Fickling, accompanied by the STEP COP, DCOP and IIE's Regional Director, met with the USAID Contracting Officer, Mr. Stanley Canton, and Senior Acquisition & Assistance Specialist, Ms. Sherine Gerguis, in the presence of the COR to discuss issues related to the STEP budget.

A second meeting was held at USAID, on November 13, with the Director of the Education Office and the COR followed with a meeting with representatives from the DG and EG offices, in the presence of the COR, to present to them the project's objectives and scope.

- On March 16, 2015, Ms. Dalia El Sayed joined STEP as a Financial Management Specialist.

VI. Challenges Encountered, Actions Taken and/or Resolutions

- **Security Clearance:** In the previous period, we reported the project inability to reach out to students in public schools due to the delay in obtaining security clearance. During this period, the project succeeded in speeding

the issuance of security clearance by gaining the buy-in of Ministry of Education's officials who were invited to participate in the outreach efforts in public schools nationwide.

- **Training plans:** Among STEP's priority sectors, USAID/Egypt's Education office remains the only technical office that offered training plans that extend throughout the project duration. For different reasons, DG, EG and Health have been unable to plan ahead.

STEP's response: STEP will continue to work with the technical offices within the available boundaries and will be ready to work with any of the offices to help develop their long-term training plans.

- **English Placement test:** Before being selected to enroll in the scholarship programs, applicants must successfully pass an English Placement test at the American University in Cairo (AUC). The test serves as an indicator to AUC on the candidate's potential to reach, at the end of the University Preparation Program, a level in the English language that is adequate for studies at US universities. During the recruitment of cohorts 1, STEP realized that several candidates who had scored high in the individual interview sessions and group activities were eventually bypassed because they failed to pass the AUC Placement test.

STEP's actions: To avoid sending in vain candidates through the selection process at a significant cost, STEP recommended and obtained USAID's approval to request from all applicants in future cohorts to submit a valid TOEFL score which will serve as an indicator for their capacity to pass the AUC Placement test.

- **TOEFL ITP testing logistics:** The recruitment criteria for cohorts 2 of both the STEM undergraduate and the MBA scholarships include a valid TOEFL ITP score of at least 450. AMIDEAST, the only institution that administers the test, had testing centers available in universities across almost all governorates. In the midst of the outreach process, AMIDEAST temporarily closed all testing centers except for Cairo, Alexandria, Mansourah, and Beni Suef. This unexpected and sudden decision affected the ability of applicants to comply with one of the application criteria.

STEP's actions: To alleviate this dilemma for the applicants from governorates where testing centers were no longer available, STEP communicated to potential applicants, via info sessions and social media, the following:

- Applications for the STEM undergraduate scholarships will be accepted on the due date of March 15, 2015, without a TOEFL ITP score. Applicants will be required to submit their score by March 31, 2015.
 - Applications for the MBA scholarships from governorates where testing centers were closed will be accepted on the due date of April 15, 2015, without a TOEFL ITP score. Applicants will be required to take the ITP test at AMIDEAST-Cairo during the group activity camp in May 2015.
- **MBA drop-outs:** In the early days after their enrollment in the University Preparation Program (UPP) at AUC, several selected participants in cohort 1 of the MBA scholarships dropped out from the program because they were not advised early enough to resign from their work. Employers are not required to reimburse employees for unused vacation and severance pay unless the employee complies with the required advance notice of resignation. A total of 12 selected participants dropped out; six of them were work related.

STEP's actions: STEP's outreach and recruitment process for cohort 1 was limited in time. As a result, STEP did not have an opportunity to finalize their selection of candidates until days before the start date of the AUC's UPP. To avoid similar circumstances, STEP intends to complete the selection of cohort 2 of the MBA scholarships program three to four weeks before the start of the UPP at AUC.

- **HEI official launch:** Since July 2014, the official launch of the Higher Education Initiative (HEI) has been repeatedly postponed. STEP was requested to put a hold on all outreach materials for the scholarship programs until HEI is officially launched. The delay in launching HEI became a threat to STEP’s outreach plan which was developed based on lessons learned from the recruitment of cohorts 1 as well as to the implementation of planned info sessions in public schools in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

STEP’s actions: In early December 2014, when the HEI planned launch was once again postponed, STEP urged USAID to allow it to proceed with its outreach plan scheduled to start on January 15, 2015, using either the HEI logo or USAID/Egypt logo. This request was well received and appreciated by the Education office. Other stakeholders, however, preferred to hold all efforts up until HEI is launched. Thanks to the support of DO/Education, STEP was finally authorized in late January 2015, to proceed with its outreach plan using the HEI logo. Though STEP had to reschedule some activities and the info sessions, the recruitment efforts were successfully conducted.

- **MOHE’s objection to place ads:** As a result of placing the first ad in Al-Ahram newspaper on February 19, 2015, to promote the MBA scholarships program, USAID received an objection from the Minister of Higher Education who asked to put a hold on future ads. STEP was planning to place two more ads in Al-Ahram between March 1-31, 2015.

STEP’s Response: In support of STEP’s outreach plan, DO/Education prepared a response to the Minister of Higher Education based on partial information provided by STEP on their regular contacts with the Ministry of Higher Education. On March 23, 2015, USAID informed STEP it can resume placing ads in the newspapers. As a result, STEP was able to place one additional ad, for a total of two (instead of three), in the Friday, March 27, 2015, edition of Al-Ahram.

VII. Success stories

- **STEM students:** On March 10, the AUC Program Manager, Ms. Hanaa Soudan, took the initiative to reward the STEM undergraduate students for their exceptional performance and commitment to the University Preparation Program. The eight STEM participants attending the UPP had demonstrated consistent effort and dedication throughout the past months and as a result have successfully completed their mid-term research papers which consisted of innovative ideas in the following areas:
 - Polymath
 - Music
 - Architecture
 - Bio Mimetic Architecture

In addition to the research papers, the students gave impressive presentations and as such, they were invited by their instructor for a reward breakfast and an outing offsite to search for new ideas for their next research topic.

The group went to El Hussein and researched Egyptian handcrafts in gold, silver, copper, Khayameya, and leather products to collect data and choose the artisans for interviews.

- **MBA scholars:** Two MBA scholars completed the following community services:
 - Sara Afifi is an active member of an NGO called “Heya Misr” which promotes gender awareness. Sara developed training curriculum and proposed programs in empowering non-privileged girls

covering the following topics: character building, nutrition, and anti-sexual harassment. The programs were adopted and implemented by Heya Misr. The participant then proposed the same programs to the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In February 2015, the Ministry adopted the programs and is planning to implement them throughout Egypt.

- Omneia Abdelaal, again an active member of Heya Misr, is trained on self-defense. Omneia trained other members who, in turn, started training others thus cascading training throughout the organizational membership in Egypt. The Ministry of Youth and Sports again adopted the training program and is implementing it throughout Egypt.
- **Testimonials:** Following are some of the testimonials received by STEP, during the period:
 - “All thanks and appreciation for this meaningful and useful training. It honestly improved my work. Now I can evaluate the training and trainers through effective and clear criteria, which we were provided with through the project. I am thankful to the session facilitators, planners, and organizers.” Gamal Fathy, Marsa Matrouh Governorate Coordinator, at the conclusion of the Technical Assistance Program to the Early Grade Reading unit at the Ministry of Education.
 - “I want to thank those in charge of the program. It was a wonderful and fruitful training. It was highly beneficial and will help us improve the EGR Program.” Mohamed Saasa, Port Said Governorate Coordinator.
 - “I really want to thank you and the IIE support team. On every meeting with you guys I observe to learn something new. Today I learned how to deliver the most sensitive messages relevant to behavior and honesty in the most decent and professional way.” An MBA scholar at AUC.
 - “I wish you a happy new year full of successes, and thank you for being a part and a reason of achieving one of my biggest dreams in the last year. Thank you for everything, your support, your trust and your belief in me and the others.” A STEM student at AUC.
 - “... you are the best! thanks a million.” A GOE official.
 - “I would particularly like to thank you for your exceptional skill and experience that came through very very clearly yesterday. You are humble, but this is backed by intercultural sensitivity and wisdom that I admired, and that is well needed when two different organizations start a partnership like ours. I feel very comfortable working with ... your team and know that we will be able to smooth any natural creases as we go.” A STEP partner organization.
 - “It really was a pleasure to work with you and everyone at the IIE. You have all been quite supportive and flexible with us. It is always encouraging to have such a great partnership.” A STEP partner organization.

VIII. Documentation of best practices that can be taken to scale

Throughout the University Preparation Program (UPP), the IIE STEP team has remained in close contact with the STEM and MBA cohort 1 participants. Every effort is made to address concerns, resolve issues that arise and work with the AUC Program Manager to make adjustments whenever possible.

On February 4, 2015, a meeting was held with the AUC Program Managers, Mr. Raafat Mikhail and Ms. Hanaa Soudan, to discuss overall feedback and performance and take lessons learned into consideration for planning cohorts 2.

The following points were discussed:

Effective use of class time: Class hours will be redistributed and program content revised to accommodate the need for increased practical classroom work towards preparation for the TOEFL and GMAT exams.

GMAT and TOEFL scores for MBA cohort 1: Given that the majority of participants scored below 500 on GMAT, this has caused both STEP and AUC to reconsider the program structure for cohort 2, building on lessons learned as well as participants and instructors feedback. The AUC program team worked with the participants who were scheduled for retakes to address areas of weakness and complete additional practice tests before the March 2015 retake test dates.

To avoid testing challenges and issues faced with cohort 1, the following approach was recommended to be implemented for cohort 2:

1- English language competency: It is expected that the TOEFL ITP score required to be submitted by applicants for cohort 2 will provide a better indication of the English language proficiency of the candidates. In addition to this requirement, AUC will administer a mock “retired” version of an English exam (comparable to IELTS), a simplified two-hour version, to cohort 2 semi- finalists. The English Mock test will be administered during a two-day workshop along with a mock 100-minute online GMAT test. Both tests will be preceded by an orientation for participants, explaining test methodology and techniques.

Administering these tests prior to the English Placement test and the start of the University Preparation Program will allow the AUC team to better identify the skill gaps of each participant and group them effectively based on levels of competency and areas of weaknesses to be addressed.

3. AUC SEPT Placement test: The Mock English and online GMAT tests will be followed by the AUC SEPT Placement test. The AUC program team will reconsider the entrance level taking into consideration the competitiveness of the pre-requisite GMAT and TOEFL IBT scores.

4. Evaluation of participants: Given the need for an increased number of alternates in cohort 2 of the MBA scholarships to make up for potential drop outs and/or participants who are unable to obtain acceptable scores for admission at U.S. universities, IIE STEP suggested that approximately 10 additional alternates are admitted to the UPP, however participants will be informed that only the top 44 (or number that makes up the balance of the 100 scholarships) will be enrolled at U.S. universities. The candidates will be scored on a set of criteria that was approved by USAID on February 25, 2015. The following weighting will be used for cohort 2 participants evaluation:

Performance	30%
GMAT	40%
TOEFL	30%

5. Evaluation of instructors - As agreed with IIE STEP, the AUC will be conducting periodical instructor evaluations to provide continued feedback from participants and allow the program team to address concerns on a timely basis. The evaluation forms will be developed by STEP.

ANNEXES LIST:

1. Information sessions schedule and pictures – STEM Cohort 2
2. USAID delegation visit photos – MBA and STEM Cohort 1
3. USAID Mission Director letter – STEM Cohort 1
4. UPP Policy and Financial Commitment – STEM Cohort 1
5. Cultural Awareness Trip Report – STEM Cohort 1
6. USAID Mission Director Letter – MBA Cohort 1
7. UPP Policy and Financial Commitment – MBA Cohort 1
8. Cultural Awareness Sessions Report – MBA and STEM Cohort 1
9. Information sessions schedule – MBA Cohort 2
10. Information sessions photos – MBA Cohort 2
11. Early Grade Reading STTA Final Report