

**Access to Microfinance & Improved Implementation of Policy Reform
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Business Associations Communications/Policy Advocacy

Final Report

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This report was prepared by **Robert McDermott**, in collaboration with Chemonics International Inc., prime contractor to the U.S. Agency for International Development for the AMIR Program in Jordan

Executive Summary

The AMIR Program Business Associations Initiative initially retained Robert McDermott and Rami Khouri in the fall of 1999 to conduct an assessment and analysis of the role of business associations in Jordan in focusing public interest and debate on issues and in influencing public policy. This process involved working with seven leading associations to determine the value that might be created by more active participation in the forum of public opinion, and their existing capabilities in communications and advocacy.

This effort was driven by the strategic view that effective advocacy and communications programs by key business associations in Jordan are vital to the evolution of a new role by the private sector: a role defined by pro-active positions and by increasing initiative.

As this effort progressed through subsequent consulting assignments, a parallel process of rationalizing the objectives and resources of the advocacy program took place.

- It was determined that there are actually three business associations with the resources, capability and commitment to drive an advocacy/communications program, and it was decided to concentrate primarily on these: The Informational Technology Association of Jordan (INT@J), the Young Entrepreneurs Association and the Business and Professional Women's Association.
- Jordan Vision 2020 provides the only overall umbrella for an advocacy/communications strategy, and needs to be 'driven'. The only organization positioned to do this, take ownership of the project, and lead the involvement of other business associations is the YEA.
- While the perception of business communities outside Jordan is critical to attracting inward investment, it has been very difficult to enlist any of the associations in taking initiatives to engage the foreign press. This simply does not register as a priority. Changing tactics, we determined that INT@J had the resources and self-interest to spearhead this effort. We are working with INT@J and taking initiatives to open channels with a broad spectrum of publications in the U.S. and Europe. If this effort is successful -- and there is no reason it should not be -- the results will also provide positive feedback to all the associations. The BA's have been quite successful on the whole in getting their messages across to the Jordanian public through the press, and in making their voices heard in parliament and the government. It is important now to show some tangible success in pursuing the more ambitious task of influencing opinion outside the kingdom.
- We also have continued the focus on teaching spokespersons for the BA's to be effective in dealing with audiences and the media. Very substantial progress has been made in equipping these high-profile individuals with the tools to become not only

more effective in communicating their messages to the public, but more comfortable in doing so and more ready to seize opportunities

We believe that the advocacy/communications development program to date has been quite successful, and that there is a new mindset among the BA's toward its role. At this juncture, what is needed most are some "big wins" -- major foreign press stories, for example, that result from initiatives taken by INT@J or YEA. This would provide tangible evidence to all the associations of the power of carefully planned and executed communications strategies, and quite possibly draw forth-new energy. These 'wins' are reasonable expectations. A U.S. press briefing tour by INT@J may be worth considering as a means of jump-starting such a campaign.

Objectives of the Consultancy

- Engage in consultation with and provide direct assistance to three key associations in formulating and implementing communications and advocacy programs through year-end.
- The three associations – Business and Professional Women's Association (BPWA), INT@J and the Young Entrepreneurs Association (YEA) – have the capability to varying degrees to, first, carry out specific advocacy and communications programs point-by-point and, second, the extend the reach of communications outside Jordan. Our purpose is to enable them to realize this potential and experience positive results and feedback. This can in turn raise the bar so that more ambitious advocacy and communications goals can be pursued in 2001.
- A primary goal was to move these associations beyond engagement with advocacy and communications strategy to a commitment to an expanded program of specific events and actions. To this end, we provided them with current press directories of U.S. and international media in order to identify target media and the purpose to be achieved in opening up channels of communication with them. With the assistance of Ammar Jaber, we have also put together a current directory of all correspondents for major foreign press organizations who cover Jordan. We know who they are, where they are and we can reach them when we either need to, or have an opportunity we want to pursue.
- Training spokespersons to be effective as public speakers, on television, and in interviews with journalists remains a prime objective. To this end, we (Zehn Ghanma, Rami Khouri and Robert McDermott) planned and executed two training seminars. The first was a basic media training workshop attended by participants who did not have prior experience. The second was a more advanced

program for participants who had completed the first, and which focused more intensely on technique.

- Efforts also focused on advocacy and communications plans that are practical and doable with the resources available to each of the associations. At this time, after approximately a year of training and development in advocacy and communications, it is important to make the execution of plans the first priority – to move beyond the strategy mode to a series of events and actions. In terms of Jordan Vision 2020, realistic assessments were made of the extent of support and involvement YEA, as the leader, could expect from other signatory BA's. Some of the less active BA's will be asked to undertake limited communications programs that are matched to what we judge they can or will do. The Zarqa Chamber of Commerce, for example, would be asked to conduct three public briefings – for their members and their community – on Jordan vision 2020 and what it means. No more. No less.

Analysis: Current Status and Potential of the Lead Associations

Business and Professional Women's Association

In terms of advocacy and communications, the BPWA engages issues of substantial importance as well as, often, some urgency in Jordan today. They do so with limited organizational and financial resources. In contrast to YEA or *INT@J*, BPWA is not a professionally managed organization. Nevertheless, it has made considerable headway in advocacy and communications.

The BPWA is the lead advocate for changing the social security law in Jordan to eliminate provisions, which discriminate against women. It has lobbied this issue effectively in parliament and communicated it broadly to opinion leaders and influential groups within Jordan. (Strategically, it would have been counterproductive to make this a highly visible public issue.)

The BPWA also is able now to produce an attractive and informative magazine-format newsletter for members and other constituents on a quarterly basis. This should be understood as no small accomplishment.

As a consequence, while committed to a series of potentially high impact communications events, they will in fact depend on continuing support and guidance from Rola Abdelhamid to succeed.

In the fourth quarter of 200, the BPWA has agreed to undertake the following advocacy/communications Plans:

- A graduation event on November 9 at which Queen Noor will present diplomas to two graduates of the BPWA's business incubator program. This will be a platform essentially for publicity, reinforcing the organization's role and stature.
- Social security and women's workplace issues: the BPWA, with the Jordan River Foundation, is conducting a series of presentations and lectures around the country, in Amman, Kerak, Madaba and the Jordan Valley.
- Equal access to parliament: the BPWA will soon begin a national program to increase voting participation among women, and to identify, encourage and support women candidates for parliament. This will be driven by a communications program aimed not only at the Jordanian public, but at engaging interest from foreign media.
- In mid-December, BPWA plans to hold an *iftar* for journalists, Jordanian and foreign. The purpose is to highlight ten years of achievement of the Women's Enterprise Center, its small business incubator and generate press coverage. This social format was chosen because the BPWA is frankly not effective at press conferences.

To support communications driven by each of these programs, the BPWA will develop an information kit on the organization, its activities and its achievements, with an information background and press release specific to each event.

[INT@J](#)

[INT@J](#), the association of the information technology industry in Jordan, now has a young public relations officer on staff, Jumana Abou-Hannoud. She exhibits a great deal of energy and considerable knowledge of her role.

In terms of advocacy, the primary objective for [Int@j](#) is to see changes in specific Jordanian laws, such as those protecting intellectual property that could discourage foreign investment. In this endeavor, they are superbly positioned through the support of HM King Abdullah himself, as well as the active support of the deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Halaika.

Communications should support foreign investor interest and potential technical alliances across the industry globally that will benefit not only the IT industry, but the Jordanian economy and Jordanians themselves. To this end, we are focusing deliberately on opening channels with the press internationally, including industry trade and technical publications, which are largely U.S.-based.

With Ra'ed Bilbaessi and Jumana Abou-Hannoud, we are putting in place the following communications program which will begin effectively on November 1:

- [Int@j](#) will 'pitch' the editors of *Business 2.0* magazine, currently the bible of the 'new economy' and IT/internet sector, on sending a team to do a story on the emerging IT sector in Jordan. Each month the magazine profiles one emerging "hot spot" in the global information economy. Jordan should be an appealing story for them. The impact value of such a story would hardly be measured. It would also make a valuable reprint to be used in a targeted mail program.
- Using a press directory of the high-tech and Computer Industry brought from the US, we have selected approximately 50 publications in North America and Europe as targets. A specific editor at each will receive an introductory e-mail from [Int@j](#), with a copy of the organization's newsletter. This will be followed immediately by an information kit that will be delivered by post. Our purpose is to spur interest and develop open communications channels with important editors. Our initial goal is to support and build interest in the IT Forum planned by [Int@j](#) for Silicon Valley in California in May 2001.

If we can implement these straightforward programs effectively, we will not only create real value in terms of international awareness of this emerging sector in Jordan. We will also have an operating model others can emulate for their own purposes.

Young Entrepreneurs Association

After some delay, the YEA now has the resources to actively spearhead communications for Jordan Vision 2020. The first step must be to put in place a person to devote full-time to the Vision 2020 program. YEA staff is spread too thin to move ahead without this.

Two primary thrusts have been agreed upon:

First, to communicate the goals to Vision 2020 and report on progress toward reaching them as it happens. The audience is the public throughout Jordan and across Jordanian society. We must rely on the signatory associations to act as arms and legs in achieving this. Each of the associations will be asked to undertake what will be for the most part *modest* assignments and projects in line with the resources and capabilities they can actually deliver. It serves no one's interests to set out unrealistic expectations that have little prospect of being met.

Second, to educate news media outside of Jordan to Vision 2020 and the dynamic changes taking place within the country. We do not expect, at least at this stage, to generate high-profile press coverage as an outcome. We do intend to build awareness of Jordan and the ambitions contained in Vision 2020, develop some level of knowledge ability and familiarity with developments in the kingdom and, finally, *nurture* future press coverage and productive ongoing relationships with journalists.

Appointing a Vision2020 Executive

YEA is about to recruit an individual to act as director of the Jordan Vision 2020 program of advocacy and communications. An assistant will also be named.

The critical issue is to ensure that the new director is given a thorough orientation at the outset, defining the mission, mandate and boundaries of the position and setting priorities. The risk is that this individual will be drawn into great many distractions, committee meetings and YEA organizational needs, and that the focus will never be established. Because YEA staff is stretched thin, the Vision2020 executive and assistant become de facto prime candidates for absorbing random projects and needs.

It is imperative that the mission be defined as *communications*, with a supporting role in advocacy. It is no less important that a program be clearly set out with six month time horizons, and that priorities be set.

Working with the BA's

Of the 28 signatories to Vision 2020, only four of the business associations have been active to any extent in bringing the vision home to the Jordanian people, or in supporting the program either financially or with an investment of time and resources.

This must be addressed: Vision 2020 will never be anything but a top-down economic strategy unless it takes hold at a grass roots level. The BA's are essential to making this a grass roots program.

I believe it will be possible for the director of Vision 2020 to get commitments from a number of the BA's – a reasonable target would be 12-14 in total – if the commitments asked for are tailored to the interests, capabilities and priorities of each individual BA. In my view, many have shied away from involvement because they perceive it as a huge, open-ended demand that could devour their limited time availability and resources. I believe they will respond positively to proposals to undertake limited, specific activities, at times and places of their own choosing.

Example: the Zarqa Chamber of Commerce could be asked to commit to holding at least two public meetings on Vision 2020 over the next six months – one for their members and a second for a wider public. This is something they can do readily – and are probably ready to do.

By pursuing this approach with each of the BAs, we will achieve a network of activities in which something to do with Vision 2020 is underway virtually all the time. No less important, we will succeed in taking the messages outside of Amman and reaching the entire country.

A professionally produced presentation on Vision 2020 in Arabic is now complete and available for use by any of the Bas.

Trigger Event: The Vision 2020 Report Card for the Year 2000

In February, 2001, the YEA plans to stage a conference that will essentially review the first year of Vision 2020 and analyze what has been accomplished vis-à-vis each of the six strategic thrusts.

This ‘report card’ exercise will guide advocacy efforts in 2001. Press will be invited to attend.

Engaging and Briefing the Foreign Media

Plans are in place to initiate contact with target foreign news media, using an introductory cover letter and information package. Amman-based correspondents for foreign news media will also be invited to a YEA *iftar* during Ramadan. The international press office of the Royal Hashemite Court will also be asked to assist in providing names and contact information for key journalists.

At this point, I would estimate the odds of this actually happening at less than 50-50, simply as a reflection of competing demands and limited resources.

Recommendations

1. AMIR should take responsibility for delivering a thorough orientation to the Vision 2020 Director and assistant, ensuring that there is a clear definition of mission, authority and priorities. Because this person may not have an extensive background in communications and advocacy, ensuring an effective grasp of these issues and tools is also mission critical.
2. An accountability system should be established for YEA communications activities. In this sphere, YEA should report to AMIR. There is no reason why this should be either intrusive or oppressive, but rather supportive. Because the staff is stretched, communications plans tend to fall off the desk at times, or suffer protracted delays at others.
3. The BPWA needs to have an individual with responsibility and authority for advocacy and communications. This should be a staff person, not a member or volunteer. A clear job description is necessary. This role is problematic in the context of an organization where officers commonly intervene in the actions and decisions of the staff.
4. It would make sense to identify spokespersons for Vision 2020 and BPWA advocacy issues, and provide continued media training. These individuals should also be willing to work with schedules of interviews, appearances and TV spots that are managed by AMIR, as well as the Vision 2020 director. A key concern is that they be available and responsive to communications opportunities developed by Vision 2020 and AMIR.