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Youth Employability Skills Network

Associate Cooperative Agreement
Award 165-A-00-10-00106-00

**Quarterly Report for the Period
January 1 through March 31, 2011**

Submitted by:
Education Development Center



Submitted to:
**Education Project Management Specialist
USAID Macedonia**

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Acronyms

AOTR	Agreement Officer's Technical Representative
AWP	Annual Workplan
COP	Chief of Party
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DOCS	Development, Outreach and Communication Specialist
EDC	Education Development Center Inc.
FAM	Financial and Administrative Manager
HICD	Human and Institutional Capacity Development
PMP	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
RFO	Regional Field Offices
SOIM	Skopje Office and Information Manager
SOM	Skopje Office Manager
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YES	Youth Employability Skills Network

Executive Summary

During this quarter, the focus of attention and action shifted from start-up and administrative activities to program implementation. The YES Network expended considerable effort in contacting potential partners, informing them of the work in which the YES Network intends to engage and discussing possible areas of complimentary and cooperative action. The project contacted potential partner organizations in the three regions and those operating nationally were contacted. Through discussions and visits, an initial impression was formed of the different potential and challenges exhibited by each region.

Meetings with the relevant departments of the Ministry of Education and Science and with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy were conducted for informational purposes and to obtain the necessary concurrences to enable the YES Network project to operate in the regions with the Vocational Education and Training schools and the Employment Service Agency regional offices. An “approval” letter was issued by the Ministry of Education and Science for YES to work with the regional VET schools and the nomination of liaison staff for each of the three regions is promised.

Direct contact was made with the Director of the Vocational Education and Training Center in Skopje to inform him of the project and seek support for its activities. A meeting with the Director of the Employment Service Agency, also located in Skopje, was conducted to satisfy the same ends. During the quarter an ESA liaison person was nominated to work the Senior Technical Specialist for Labor Markets.

In the regions, YES staff conducted preliminary visits to meet with the heads of each Municipality, with the Directors of the Local Economic Development and Education Departments and with NGO representatives to inform these significant others about the program which they will be partnering. Following these visits, in each location, general “town hall” type meetings were held to which representatives of the Municipality, the VET schools, ESA offices, employers and NGOs were invited to learn about the YES Network project, to ask questions and to express opinions about the proposed project activities. More than fifty individuals attended the meetings, in each location.

During the quarter EDC completed the drafting of its Annual Workplan (AWP) and its Performance Measurement Plan (PMP). Following a review by USAID both instruments were finalized and approved by the donor. The YES Network project is now in a position to commence the collection of field data for the purpose of structuring baseline profiles for each of the operational areas. Against this, implementation progress and the achievement of targets will be measured.

Final staff recruitment was conducted during the reporting period with the Senior Technical Specialist for Public-Private Dialogue and for the Regional Coordinators. The YES Skopje office furnishing and equipping was completed. All necessary registrations of the project were finalized allowing YES to start reclaiming its VAT payments through USAID.

1. Program Activities and Outcomes

Sector specific activities and outcomes are reported below.

1.1. Labor Markets

The Senior Technical Specialist for Labor Markets started working on the YES project on January 22nd and during the quarter under report engaged in the following activities with the stated outcomes:

- Organized visit in Kumanovo Municipality. The objective of the meeting was to learn how the first local Economic and Social Council was organized, to be informed about its current structure and functioning and to review the challenges the organizers met during the lifetime of Council. Opposition, or at best a significant lack of interest from the business community, continues to have a dampening effect on the functioning of this Council. Initial opposition from the Mayor stemmed from his conviction that the Council would undermine his authority and executive power. For the YES Network, these are important aspects to acknowledge as the project initiates discussions with municipalities and employers organizations regarding their roles in the proposed local Economic and Social Councils.
- Held an introductory meeting with the Director of the VET Center at which he was presented the concept of YES Network Project. The meeting ended with a promise of cooperation from the VET Center and the nomination of counterparts from within the staff body of the VET Center. This is important for the YES Network project as it will facilitate the work with VET school staff in the technical interventions and in the training on workforce readiness skills.
- Met representatives from a consortium formed by the Center for Business Cooperation (CDS), a consulting and training company based in Skopje, and the International Training and Consulting Agency (ITC), another Skopje-based organization that specializes in acts in mediation in employment in Macedonia and internationally. The representatives from the Consortium presented their activities and EDC presented the concept of the YES Network Project. The Consortium previously worked on the Internship and Job Placement Program – “My Career”, which was developed by the USAID Competiveness Project to encourage business internships. The ITC Agency has experience in training the teachers from VET schools for mentoring. The discussion revealed just how little valued internships are by some sections of the employer population, who consider them to be only an expense, while they also state that candidates for employment are of low quality. As a result, YES will most likely be approaching employers through organizations such as the Business Confederation of Macedonia and the Macedonian Employers’ Organization rather than individually.
- Met with two representatives from Mladiinfo-FEJS MK. It is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in Skopje, Macedonia in 2003 as a local office of the European FEJS network. In partnership with the National University Library “St. Kliment Ohridski” in Skopje, Mladiinfo is launching the Grant Info Center. In the state-of-the-art premises designed to bring a face-to-face contact with young people, students and all interested individuals or groups Mladiinfo offers access to information on different programs and educational opportunities free of charge. YES Network staff presented the concept of the project and discussed possibilities for

cooperation. There may be potential for cooperation in determining the best ways and means for communicating with young people. This organization conducts trainings for young people on improving skills such as CV writing , interviewing and also soft skills. Mladiinfo also operates in Strumica, which is potentially useful, as this is one of the regions where the YES Network also operates.

- YES Network staff participated in a presentation of the Regional Survey for Internship presented to the Internship working group at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. This allowed the staff to become acquainted with the latest research on the subject.
- The YES staff met with the World Learning, Inc. Human and Institutional Development Project (HIDP) and discussed possibilities for cooperation. HIDP works with established institutions deemed key to future of Macedonia and to USAID strategy and with start-up institutions, individuals or groups via technical assistance interventions, participant training and academic initiatives. The discussion focused on the potential opportunities for mutual cooperation with the VET Center, Bureau for Development of Education and Macedonian Human Resources Association.
- Met with the Director of the Employment Service Agency (ESA) and presented the objectives and main activities of the YES Network project. In addition to promising cooperation and support, the Director offered YES the opportunity to make a presentation of its program to ESA Field Office Directors. Staff presented the YES Network Project to the Directors of the Tetovo, Bitola, Strumica, Gostivar, Prilep and Radovish ESA Offices and the Department Heads from the ESA Central Office. A meaningful discussion developed about the possibilities of future work of the project with the staff of the regional ESA offices.
- Met with the staff of the Labor Market Department from Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and presented the YES Network project. The Labor Market Department staff stated their intended support for the YES Network Project, particularly with the establishment of local economic and social councils. This is an important commitment since public-private dialogue conducted through these councils will play a key role in achieving the goals of better qualified career coaches and councilors in VET Schools Career Centers and ESA Job Clubs.
- Met with the Director of NGO Macedonian Civic Education Center, a legacy organization formed by CRS through an USAID-funded project. The NGO is a leader in developing educational programs and providing services to education and other public institutions, local communities, non-governmental sector, business sector and citizens in order to contribute to the continuous development of the civil society. Discussions focused on possibilities for cooperation.
- Worked with an EDC Work Readiness Specialist, who provided an introduction to the EDC work readiness curriculum, which will form the basis for the training of both ESA and VET staff later in the year. The first visit lasted three days, during which time the consultant was familiarized with the YES Network project's as yet incomplete Annual Workplan to determine how the EDC Workforce Readiness Curriculum could be adapted for application in Macedonia. During a second 10-day visit, the YES Network team worked with the Specialist on strategic and action planning for project implementation in the regions and on preparations for a comprehensive review and revision of the curriculum by the YES Network team. At the end of the quarter, this

review was 90% complete. In the first weeks of April, the revised curriculum will be reviewed by EDC technical specialists in the US and a training plan and schedule will be developed by the YES team.

- The Senior Technical Specialist for Labor Markets participated in the presentation of the results of a survey on internship by AmCham. Representatives of universities and businesses were present. The presentation afforded an excellent opportunity to learn about the current status of internships as perceived by career development professionals and the business community. This knowledge will be useful in designing the internship element of the YES Network project.
- Met representatives from the Youth Cultural Center in Bitola to explore possibilities for collaboration. This is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit youth organization established in 1997. One of the main goals of the Center is the expansion of knowledge about volunteerism, and non-formal education. The Center has delivered training on soft skills to youth from Skopje, Tetovo, Bitola, Shtip and Struga. It was concluded that the Center could be engaged as a service provider, especially in working with youth to help them understand perspectives and attitudes necessary to benefit from an internship.
- Met representatives from the Coalition of Youth Organizations (SEGA) based in Prilep to discuss possible cooperation. SEGA works to develop and implement youth policies throughout the country and to connect and strengthen young people to improve their overall wellbeing.
- Met with the Program Coordinator from Habitat for Humanity Macedonia and discussed possibilities for cooperation. The Habitat project will work in seven (7) municipalities including Veles, Strumica, Prilep, Kumanovo, Struga, Tetovo and Kochani. The discussion ranged over the possibilities for some degree of cooperation in creating internship possibilities and employment opportunities of youth.

1.2. VET Schools

The position of Senior Technical Specialist for VET Schools was hired as February 1st. During the two months in the quarter under report when this Specialist was active the following accomplishments should be noted:

- Met with the Head of Primary and Secondary Education at the Ministry of Education and Science, Ms. Elena Ivanovska, to inform her about the goals, main objectives and proposed activities of USAID YES Network project and to exchange ideas for future collaboration between the project and Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). It was suggested to EDC that the project work with a liaison based in Skopje that would be responsible for each of the regions in which the YES Network will operate. Both parties found that a liaison will facilitate the flow of information to the MoES about YES activities, giving the MoES a clearer understanding of the project, resulting in a higher level of facilitation and support from the institution.
- Presented the YES Network Project to the State Secretary and Chief of the Cabinet of the Ministry of Education and Science. The presentation sought to inform the audience and to gain the State Secretary's support for activities to be conducted with VET schools in the regions. The

State Secretary's support would also facilitate the MoES "approval" letter to the YES Network project.

- Received an official approval letter from the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) for implementation of the YES Network Project's activities in all public schools in Macedonia during the second half of the quarter. The letter emphasizes that the YES Network's objectives are closely related to the main priorities of the MoES and consequently the YES Network will be fully supported by the MoES in its implementation.
- Presented project goals, objectives and activities to the Advisors at the Center for Vocational Education and Training (VET Center), the YES Network's main implementing partner in the VET schools. After the presentation, there was open discussion on how to incorporate proposed project activities into the existing VET curriculum.
- Presented the YES Network Project activities to selected advisors at the Bureau for Development of Education-BDE, also one of the YES Network partners. Some ideas about better implementation of the project and future collaboration were exchanged.

1.3. Public-Private Dialogue

The Senior Technical Specialist for this sector was not in position during the quarter under report. The hire was completed on April 6th with sector specific activities starting thereafter.

1.4. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist was appointed on February 1st 2011. During the quarter the following activities were performed and outcomes noted.

Development of the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)

- During this quarter the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) for the YES Network Project was finalized. For the purpose of developing the PMP, in early February, the YES Network team participated in a one-day workshop for defining the expected outcomes of the project activities planned for the FY2011 using the Logical Framework model.
- Based on this product, the M&E Specialist was able to develop a draft version of indicators for the Project objectives, followed by indicator definition, data source, unit of measurement, baseline information, where this was possible, and targets for each year of the Project. The baseline information now missing will be made available during the coming quarter.
- Through a collaborative effort by the program staff and COP the final version of the PMP was created. In the second half of March, it was sent for approval to the Project AOTR at USAID and was approved.

- The PMP includes the indicators developed by the project, the USAID standard indicators, and the EQUIP3 indicators related to the workforce development programs.
- With the PMP complete and approved, the YES Network team has clear guidelines for measuring the progress toward YES Network Project goal and objectives. The collaborative approach will ensure understanding of the outcomes to be evaluated and the method of evaluation.

Review of M&E tools

- The YES Network staff and an EDC Workforce Development Specialist shared tools for measuring the work readiness of the young people after participating in training programs. The M&E specialist has reviewed the tools and will use some as resource for the development of the YES Network M&E tools.

1.5. Cross-Sectoral Activities

These program activities involved all four sectors of the YES Network project and were associated with the presentation of the program to Municipalities, the business sector and the NGO community in the regions where the Network will operate during its first year.

- The Senior Technical Specialist –Labor Markets, the Senior Technical Specialist-VET Schools and the Chief of Party presented the YES Network Project to the newly arrived USAID Macedonia Mission Director.
- The Senior Technical Specialists for Labor Markets and VET Schools and the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer met with the Chief of Cabinet, the Head of the Education Department and the Head of the Local Economic Development Department of Tetovo to present the YES Network project. The Municipality of Tetovo expressed great interest in cooperating with and supporting the Project.
- YES Network staff visited Bitola, Tetovo and Strumica during the reporting period to promote the program, engage potential training partners, discuss the project and possibilities for support and cooperation with local leaders and explore the possibility of opening EDC Regional Offices in these towns.
- Together with the senior technical specialists, the M&E Specialist met with representatives from the Education and Local development sectors from Tetovo, Strumica and Bitola, with the exception of Tetovo, where the meeting was held with the Chief of the Mayor’s cabinet. These initial meetings introduced the project and established a partnership between the project and the municipality. In these meetings, the M&E Specialist explained the purpose of the monitoring and evaluation approach and the importance of its participatory nature.
- Meetings were also held with youth organizations and other USAID funded projects – Chamber of Crafts in Bitola, the MoES IPA Coordinator and Adult Education Center, IDEAS and Macedonian Human Resources Association, Youth Cultural Center in Bitola, the CARANA Competitiveness project and My Career, a spin off indigenous for-profit organization. All these

meetings were designed to inform the YES Network project in the areas of potential cooperation.

- Presentations of the YES Network project were made for other USAID-funded Education and Economic Growth sector projects, the VET center and ESA staff. During the presentations, the M&E specialist had the opportunity to meet with the key partners of the YES Network Project and to become familiar with their work and the potential for further involvement.
- Starting with Bitola, YES Network staff met with the Head of Education and the Head of Local Economic Development at the Municipality. The YES Network project was presented possibilities for cooperation were discussed. Both Heads expressed great interest in supporting and working with the project. The YES Network staff also met with the President of the Chamber of Crafts in Bitola to present the project and to discuss possibilities for collaboration. Specifically, the Chamber may act as channel for meeting with local entrepreneurs who might provide internship opportunities to youth. The President expressed an interest in cooperating with the YES Network project. Visits by YES to Strumica and Tetovo to achieve the same goals as in Bitola were also made during the quarter.
- In Bitola, YES staff made a presentation of the project goals, objectives and planned activities to 50 potential partners and stakeholders. A fruitful discussion developed from the participants on issues associated with youth unemployment and the ways to confront it through community action and enhancement of the workforce preparedness skills of ESA and VET School staff. The EDC Senior Project Director participated in this meeting.
- In Tetovo, YES staff presented the Network project to 60 potential partners and stakeholders. An energetic discussion developed on the issue of unemployment among youth and the possible solutions available to the community and to government institutions such as the VET Schools and the ESA Offices.
- In Strumica, YES staff presented the goals, objectives and proposed main activities of the YES Network project to 50 potential partners and participants. A lively discussion and exchange of views took place. Following the meeting, a focus group of secondary school youth was organized. Students expressed their ambitions regarding their future careers and talked about the skills that would help them secure employment in meaningful, remunerative and long-term jobs. In each of the three implementation areas, all agreed that this project can be successful only if it is implemented in partnership with local authorities.
- Senior staff and the COP interviewed candidates for the still vacant position of Senior Technical Specialist-Public Private Dialogue. A candidate was proposed to USAID and accepted.
- The Senior Technical Specialist –Labor Markets, Senior Technical Specialist-VET Schools and the Chief of Party interviewed candidates for the vacant positions of Regional Coordinators for Tetovo, Bitola and Strumica. Offers of employment will be extended during the first weeks of the quarter.
- The EDC Senior Project Director for the YES Network project visited the project March 3-8. The Director participated in the meeting in Bitola with potential partners and participants and, in

addition, met with the USAID Education and Economic Growth teams about the project. He also participated in various program planning activities with the staff in conjunction with the Chief of Party.

2. Activities proposed for the coming quarter : April through June

2.1. Labor Markets

- To determine, with all the Directors of the regional ESA offices, the physical state of the Job Clubs and the kinds of services they offer to registered unemployed individuals.
- To define, with the ESA Regional Office Directors, the group of ESA staff that will attend the Work Readiness Training offered by EDC this coming May and June.
- To meet with the Head of Labor Market Social Dialogue of Ministry of Labor and Social Policy to discuss possible collaboration and support in facilitating local social dialogue. The Ministry of Labor was involved in establishment of first local economic and social council in Kumanovo facilitated by the USAID BEA Project.
- To discuss opportunities for collaboration with the representatives of the USAID Competitiveness Project (MCP) / My Career Initiative spin off. Currently, there are three possible areas of collaboration:
 - Internship programs: As part of the “My Career” Initiative, MCP has engaged a number of municipalities to train and promote internship programs in 50 municipalities. YES Network will consider the possibility for cooperation in its selected regions.
 - Industry-led education and training programs: MCP currently works with companies in the apparel, ICT and light manufacturing sector. It has identified a number of areas where business requires technical and soft skills from job seekers. YES Network could review the possibilities available to youth to increase their employability in these areas.
 - Roll-out of career counselors: The Competitiveness project has supported the training and certification of over 20 GCDF master trainers. The YES project could collaborate with the GCDF association and MCP to utilize these services for roll out of career counseling centers.
- To meet representatives of USAID IDEAS Project to identify possible areas for collaboration. IDEAS Project/Public Private Dialogue will work with Chamber of Commerce and capacity building of local socio economic councils.
- To decide, with the Director of ESA Skopje, who will be the liaison from the ESA Head Office to the project.
- To contribute to the review and revision of the EDC workforce readiness curriculum and participate in the EDC team effort to deliver trainings, during May and June, to a possible 80 participants gathered from VET schools, ESA offices and NGOs.

- Working in cooperation with the YES Network M&E Specialist, to determine baseline data on the ESA staff and the registered unemployed they coach and choose which data will be used in the evaluation of project achievements in the Performance Monitoring Plan.

2.2. VET Schools

- To finalize modules of the Work Readiness Skills Curriculum together with the Senior Technical Specialists and the EDC Workforce Development Specialist. Adapted modules will be translated into Macedonian and Albanian.
- To develop a training program for Work Based Learning activities.
- To organize regional meetings with directors of all secondary schools from the 3 target municipalities. The objective of these meetings will be to inform the directors about project activities and objectives, as well as the application procedure for their involvement in YES Network activities.
- To complete the schools application process and the final list of schools and teachers to be included in project activities.
- To organize and implement two training sessions with selected teachers about work readiness skills in May and June. The workshops will be delivered by EDC consultants and YES technical specialists.
- Working in cooperation with the YES Network M&E Specialist, to determine baseline data on the VET school staff and the final year students they coach and counsel, which will be used in evaluation of project achievements in the Performance Monitoring Plan.

2.3. Public-Private Dialogue

Planned activities for the component on building public-private dialogue to better match the workforce readiness and “soft” skills required in the labor market with those developed in the schools include:

- To identify and profile youth serving NGOs from the three regions (Tetovo, Bitola and Strumica) that will be involved in the forthcoming work readiness workshop (to be held in the second half of May and June).
- To develop application forms that will be used for recruiting youth serving NGO members that will participate in the workshops.
- To identify potential representatives from the local community who will be involved in the establishment of the Local Economic-Social Councils and the Youth Leadership Council in the three municipalities.

- To take initial steps, through informational meetings about process and procedure, for establishing local Economic and Social Councils. This could involve a study tour for selected individuals to a country in the region – Croatia or Serbia –to directly expose potential participants to the workings of such councils.
- Working in cooperation with the YES Network M&E Specialist, to determine baseline data on the staff and volunteers of youth serving NGOs and the unemployed and unregistered youth they engage with to be used in evaluation of project achievements in the Performance Monitoring Plan.

2.4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Implementation of a baseline study

- To create necessary M&E instruments for the baseline study.
- To administer questionnaires and focus groups of secondary school teachers, pedagogues and psychologists; ESA staff and NGO staff that will be involved in the training. Youth and employers will be surveyed in the beginning of the fall, before involving them in training activities.
- To process quantitative and qualitative data.
- To prepare the baseline report.

Appointing an intern

- To engage an intern for six months to work full time with the YES Network team. His/her primary assignment will be to assist the M&E Specialist in performing field activities, data input and maintaining a training database. The intern will assist the other program and administrative staff as needed.

Forming and training of the M&E team

- To form the core M&E team, which will be composed of the M&E Specialist, the three Regional Coordinators and the Intern. The Regional Coordinators will be responsible for contacting the stakeholders and for data collection in their respected regions. They will be also responsible for keeping records of the trained persons in their regions. The Intern will support these activities. For this purpose the M&E Specialist will organize an instruction meeting to present the M&E approach and tools. Subsequent meetings will be performed as needed.

Participating in trainings

The M&E specialist will be present at the YES Network trainings in May and June, to achieve to goals of:

- To perform an evaluation of the training.
- To appreciate the YES Network program activities in greater detail in order to provide the most relevant and appropriate M&E services.

3. Administration Activities and Outcomes

The following activities were finalized during January through March quarter:

- 5 staff members employed.
- Office in Skopje fully furnished.
- Computers, printers, copier and other equipment as well as the network, set up in the Skopje Office.
- The Financial Analyst from EDC Washington Office responsible for YES Network visited Skopje Office with the purpose of delivering orientation and training to the YES Finance and Administrative Manager.
- Interviews for the STS PPD were performed during mid-March.
- Interviews for the Regional Coordinators were performed in late March.
- The YES Network project was registered in the Secretariat for European Issues (SEP). Also, tax number for the project from the Public Revenue Office (UJP) was secured. EDC Skopje is now able to apply for VAT payments reimbursement.

Activities proposed for the next quarter:

- Employment of STS PPD and the 3 Regional Coordinators.
- Orientation of the new employees.
- Setting up offices in Tetovo, Strumica and Bitola: renovation, furniture and equipment. It is agreed with the municipalities that the office space will be provided by the municipality and YES Network project will provide necessary equipment and furniture.
- Setting up procedures for managing the financial and administration activities in the Regional Offices: petty cash, purchasing orders and such like.
- 2010 VAT reimbursement documents will be submitted to USAID for reimbursement.

- January through March 2011 VAT reimbursement documents to be submitted to USAID for reimbursement.