

THIRD ARAB DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM
Reforming the Education System in the Arab World with the View of Enhancing
Employability of Outcomes
Kuwait - November 5th, 2014

OBJECTIVES

The symposium aims at providing an overview of the status of the employability of the educational sector graduates in the Arab countries. More specifically, the symposium will identify the main constraints hindering the improvement of the employability of educational outcomes, and underline both general public policies and reforms within the education system capable of overcoming these constraints.

THEMES

Three areas are the focus of the symposium: i) determining whether the Arab education systems serve as barriers or enhancers of employability; ii) improving the links between education and the job market by looking at the role of public policy at the macroeconomic level; and iii) the role of governance and accountability in the improvement of the quality of education and employability at the microeconomic level. The panel discussion will be focused on discussing possible options for reform in enhancing the employability of educational outcomes in the Arab countries.

The symposium will be held for one day at the headquarters of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development in Kuwait and will be carried out with simultaneous translation in Arabic and English. A summary of the proceedings of the symposium will be produced shortly after the symposium in both Arabic and English.

CONTACTS

Mustapha Rouis, Lead Economist
Chief Economist Office, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank
1818 H St. NW, Washington, DC 20433, USA
Ph: (202)-473-4633; Fax: (202) 522-2510; e-mail: mrouis@worldbank.org

Imed Limam, Senior Economist
Arab Fund for Economist and Social Development
P.O. Box: 21923 Safat 13080 Kuwait
Ph: (965) 4959277-Fax: (965) 4815750/60/70; e-mail: ilimam@arabfund.org

Synopsis on the Main Themes

Introduction: Keynote Addresses. The keynotes will provide the economic context and the broad policy direction for education and labor market reform.

- 1.) **Are Arab Education Systems Barriers or Enhancers of Employability?** This session will provide an overview of the constraints (macro and sector specific) facing the education sector, with an emphasis on prioritization. The session should draw on the findings of the two MENA regional flagship reports: *The Road Not Traveled* (2008) and *Jobs for Shared Prosperity* (2013). These reports highlight the need for urgent education reform as the existing system is failing to deliver on both quality and labor market relevance. These two regional flagship reports provide a broad roadmap based on different types of engineering measures, incentive structures, and public accountability mechanisms. The 2013 report, notably chapter 6 which discusses the skills gaps and meritocracy deficit in MENA, emphasizes the need to build educational and training systems reform on timely information on education and labor market outcomes. Such information is essential not only to formulate policy but also to guide young people’s decision-making and realistically shape their expectations. It also argues that educational and training systems need to replace the current logic of selecting students with logic of fostering learning.

- 2.) **Linking education to the job market (I): The role of public policy in realigning the incentives for skills and employability (90 minutes).** This session will discuss policy reforms **at the macro** level that would enhance compatibility between the educational choices and the job market. More specifically, it will address “wrong signals” received from the job markets; apprenticeship, vocational education and job placement, and skill certifications. The session should draw on the findings of the 2013 flagship report *Jobs for Shared Prosperity*, particularly chapter 9 which discusses the realignment of incentives for skills and employability. It will also focus on concrete efforts being made at a regional level to improve quality of general education in the Arab countries.

- 3.) **Linking education to the job market (II): The role of education governance, assessment and accountability in improving quality and employability of outcomes (90 minutes).** This session will focus on **sector specific reforms** in areas such as education regulations, curriculum structure, governance, and accountability which affect the quality of education and employability of outcomes. There are at present very few countries in the Arab World that have national student assessment and accountability system in place. The session should draw on the ongoing work of Hana Brixi (MNSHD) on Service Delivery in the HD sectors, with a focus on accountability. It should also draw on the findings of the Workforce Development (WfD) tool, and the System Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), which offers a diagnostic baseline on which national policy makers can begin to build. This tool has recently been applied by the World Bank to seven MENA countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, Tunisia, and Yemen) along the three system dimensions (strategic framework, system oversight and service delivery). The study shows “more variation in terms of their strategic framework and on average score better in this dimension, while they score lower and more alike on the dimensions of system oversight and service delivery”.

4.) **Panel discussion: Options to reform the education system for better employability (90 minutes).** The focus of the discussion will be around the next steps, i.e. where to go from here. The discussion will cover issues raised above such as public policy, governance and accountability and curriculum reform. Some aspects related to active labor market policy (ALMP), notably the “dual education system” and its applicability in the region would be another area of focus.

Remarks. There are several other important studies related to the broad agenda of education and labor market reform which are left out from the proposed agenda for the sake of better focus. These include a) *The Status of Early Childhood Development in the Middle East and North Africa (2012)*; b) *Building Effective Employment Programs for Unemployed Youth in the Middle East and North Africa (2013)*; and c) *Benchmarking Governance (2013)*. It should be noted that Active Labor Market Programs (ALMP) can help, provided that they are well refocused, correct employment barriers that can arise from the existence of skills mismatches, insufficient labor demand, and information asymmetries.

The *Benchmarking Governance* study does address the question of why poor university governance can hinder the employability of graduates. The study examines 100 universities in seven MENA countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and WBG) using the University Governance Screening Card (UGSC) benchmarking tool. The UGSC study served to identify governance trends and models and helped to build a community of practice for higher education leaders to share experiences and learn from one another. The study showed that there are different governance approaches used across the seven countries that participated in the UGSC benchmarking exercise. It also showed that external assessments like the UGSC can be an important impetus to change and reform.