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It's All About the Jobs

How are social entrepreneurs ensuring that programs designed to help youth find employment go beyond training or coursework to actually ensure that young people obtain meaningful employment? In the complex global arena of youth unemployment, no one brilliant idea or innovation will solve the challenge of youth unemployment but flashes of insight that fundamentally change how we approach a problem can catalyze a solution. This article describes one such important catalyst in addressing the crisis of youth unemployment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: reimagining education, not as an isolated endeavor but as one with points along the school-to-work continuum that are informed by a number of key stakeholders. This article discusses the experience of Education For Employment (EFE), an organization that a decade ago channeled a flash of insight to revamp the conventional “supply-driven” approach to youth education to become an approach to education *for employment*.

THE CHALLENGE

For a year after she graduated from university, 26-year-old Ilhem Zaghoud from Tunisia could not secure a job. Despite having specialized in economics, her situation was, as she described it to EFE, “precarious” and her education “way too theoretical and not related to the reality of the professional world.” Ilhem then spent four months in a training program where she learned goal-setting, teamwork, critical thinking, communication skills, and sales techniques. The program, delivered by EFE-Tunisie, also helped her land a job at a leading multinational that was expanding its operations in North Africa. More than six months later, Ilhem was still working, convinced that the training had given her a strong commitment to

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her customers and her employer, and a foundation that continued to influence her performance. She felt the training had transformed her beyond her professional life as well, enabling her to contribute to her family's income and building her confidence and her ability to adapt to challenges. But the most important aspect of her training, she said, was learning "how to plan my career and take ownership of my future." For the first time since she left university, Ilhem is now excited about her future and about what she can do for others to "pay forward" the impact the EFE training has had on her life.

The instability and frustration of Ilhem's situation is familiar to many youth living in the MENA region. With the world's highest percentage of youth—approximately 33 percent of the population—and the highest youth unemployment rate, one in four of the region's 100 million young people is unemployed, and a young person is four times as likely as an adult to be unemployed.¹ The issue has become an increasingly urgent priority for countries in the region and for the international community alike, as millions of Arab youth are in need of an economic future that can support human development and social cohesion.² Counter-intuitively, the youth unemployment crisis coincides with a demand for skilled labor that is growing faster than supply. By 2020, McKinsey & Company estimates, developing countries could have 45 million jobs for workers with secondary education that will go unfilled.³

Young people's frustration with the unemployment problem, as well as with corruption and a desire for political, social, and economic reforms, triggered the 2011 "Arab Spring," which erupted in Tunisia and spread across the MENA region. Without better youth employment prospects, the risk of ongoing social turmoil remains high.

Addressing the region's youth employment challenge is not simple. The International Monetary Fund contends that poor education content and delivery are critical factors that are exacerbated by demographic pressures.⁴ Because education in the region does not equip youth with work skills, it also does not necessarily lead to employment. In fact, having an advanced education often increases a young person's chance of being unemployed. In Tunisia, for example, 40 percent of university graduates like Ilhem are unemployed, compared to 24 percent of youth without university degrees.⁵ Moreover, there are virtually no mechanisms for connecting underserved youth to a first job after they complete their education. Without that first job, a crucial stepping stone into the professional world, young people face a cycle of unsuccessful job interviews and a bleak future.

The fact that more education does not result in better employment prospects underscores the need for a qualified labor supply in the region, which makes it difficult for employers to find the right talent in the right quantity. Fewer than half the employers polled by McKinsey consider graduates adequately prepared for work,⁶ and 87 percent of CEOs polled in the Middle East believe that the limited supply of candidates with the right skills will present the biggest organizational challenge for business over the next three years.⁷

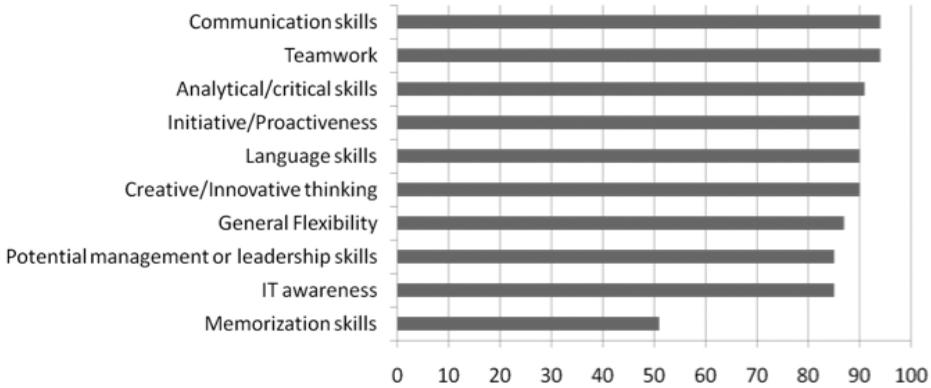


Figure 1. Types of skills considered important when recruiting graduates

Source: Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation and PricewaterhouseCoopers, “Arab Human Capital Challenge: The Voice of CEOs.” Dubai, United Arab Emirates: Authors, 2008.

According to McKinsey’s report on the global youth unemployment crisis, titled “Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works,” “employers, education providers and youth live in parallel universes.”⁸ For example, they have different views about the job readiness of graduates: only 42 percent of employers and 45 percent of youth believe that new graduates are adequately prepared for entry-level jobs, whereas 72 percent of education providers hold that view. One-third of employers say they never communicate with education providers, and of those that do, fewer than 50 percent say the communication was effective. More than one-third of education providers report that they are unable to estimate the job-placement rates of their graduates, and fewer than 50 percent of youth say that they had a good understanding of the job market when they chose their course of study.⁹

One example of the mismatch between youth and employers is the skills gap. According to a report by the Al Maktoum Foundation and PricewaterhouseCoopers, over 600 CEOs in the MENA region believe that young graduates have not been taught the kinds of “soft skills” that are in highest demand, including teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, communication, taking initiative, and flexibility (see figure 1).¹⁰

Intensifying this labor mismatch are social and gender divides. Private-sector employers often are reluctant to hire youth from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, and youth in turn do not trust that the system will give them a fair chance. Young women, despite attaining higher levels of education, are especially vulnerable. In some MENA countries the unemployment rate among university-educated women is three to eight times that of university-educated men.¹¹

RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGE

More than training is required to resolve this issue. Young people also need to believe that they can add significant value to the companies they work for. To secure and succeed in their first jobs, they also need the confidence brought by hands-on learning and on-the-job training. Civil society organizations can help these youth by working to change attitudes, creating training and work experiences, and providing youth with ongoing opportunities to develop social capital.

According to McKinsey, it will be crucial to develop intervention models that specifically bridge the gap between education systems and employers' needs in order to create systemic change. Their "Education to Employment" report refers to two features that are common to innovative and effective programs in existence worldwide. First, education providers and employers step into each other's worlds: employers help design curricula and send employee volunteers to speak in classrooms, while education providers have students spend time at job sites and help them secure hiring commitments.¹² Second, employers and education providers work with young people early on in their training, and employers commit to hire young people before the students enroll in a training program. According to the report, the "education-to-employment journey is treated as a continuum in which employers commit to hire youth before they are enrolled in a program to build their skills."¹³

Since the Arab Spring, governments across the region have increasingly come to view youth unemployment as a top national priority. Public awareness of the issue remains high, and business leaders are looking for tangible ways to contribute to a solution. While there is clear recognition that youth employment and jobs need to be at the center of national priorities and policies, many policymakers and business leaders struggle with how to approach such a multifaceted challenge. As one organization operating since before the Arab Spring and the attendant focus on Arab youth employment, Education For Employment offers an example of a promising model that is successfully bridging the gap between school and work for Arab youth.

CASE STUDY: EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The genius of EFE is that it is not catering to an elite. It is talking to the general population and giving them the basic skills they need to get by on a day-to-day basis. It is maybe a small idea but it can reach millions of people.

—Omar Chaabi

Executive Vice President, Ynna Holding and EFE-Maroc board member

A decade ago, EFE founder Ron Bruder was inspired to pioneer a new model of employment support that would address a paradox rampant throughout the MENA region: while one in four youth was jobless, countless job openings

remained unfilled due to a lack of skilled labor. Bruder's efforts were guided by a fundamental belief that, when a young person has a job, he or she develops dignity and the hope of building a future—the foundation of stable societies. Working with a group of regional experts, advisors, and business leaders from the region, Bruder established an organization that would address two key drivers of youth unemployment: the mismatch between skills offered by young job seekers and those desired by management, and the limited access to private-sector partners that had long confounded previous youth employment intervention efforts. From EFE's inception, Bruder, himself a private-sector entrepreneur who had built and sold numerous enterprises, insisted on an approach that would focus on results and be anchored by partnerships with true local ownership. EFE was launched with a singular focus on job placement and retention as the measures of success, not simply the number of youth trained. Offering programs driven by local businesses' demand for employees, locally run EFE country affiliates deliver content and secure capacity-building resources and expertise from an international network.

In its first several years, EFE set out to test this new model for securing stable, full-time employment for youth and creating locally owned and operated organizations to carry out the programming and activities most relevant to their country context.

Although EFE is now a network of local nonprofits in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen, Morocco, and Tunisia, which are supported by organizations in the United States and Europe, the first group of young people trained by EFE graduated less than seven years ago, in the fall of 2006. Twelve young men and two young women from the Gaza Strip completed a “mini-MBA” program, and five were placed in full-time jobs upon graduation. (More job commitments had been secured but not fulfilled because of logistical complications due to the political climate.) Building on these modest beginnings, EFE began to recruit new employer partners and bring best-in-class skills training to the region.

One of the earliest problems expressed by numerous employers was the dearth of young people with very basic but fundamental work skills. Responding to this need, EFE found and adapted to the MENA region a tested soft-skills training curriculum, Workplace Success, that was originally developed by McGraw-Hill for the U.S. career college market. The curriculum uses an experiential learning methodology to teach young people necessary and relevant behavioral skills that enable them to excel in the workplace and maintain their jobs. The methodology stresses personal skill development, with a focus on interpersonal strengths and leadership, self-presentation, goal-setting, effective communication, teamwork, and time management. While a few of the skills and behaviors are taught through traditional learning methods (e.g., lectures and book learning), EFE places greater emphasis on experiential learning to deliver the content and skills necessary for success in the workplace. One technique used often in the classroom is peer- and trainer-evaluated role-playing. For example, students are asked to interview each other for a job, which gives them the opportunity to learn what it is like to be both inter-

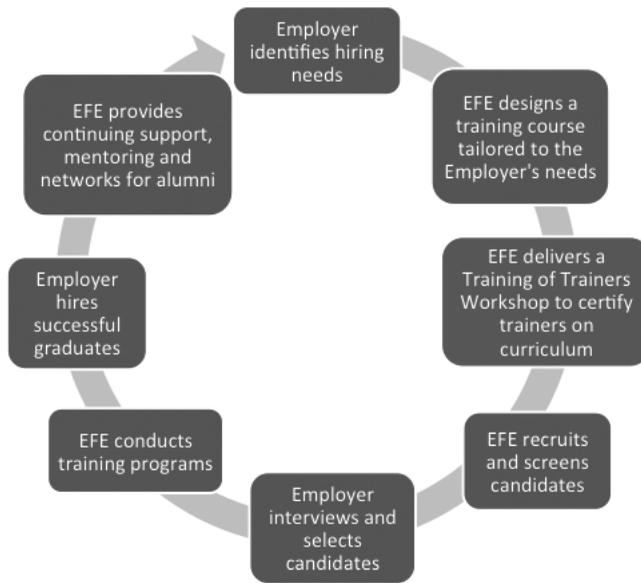


Figure 2. EFE’s End-to-End Solution

viewer and interviewee. These role-play scenarios are evaluated by peers and trainers and are videotaped so the students can observe characteristics of the people involved, such as body language. Students also have one-on-one consultations with trainers to help them understand their strengths and weaknesses in developing soft skills for job success.

Over the years, EFE affiliates have built on and customized the Workplace Success training and delivery program to focus on the soft skills most valued in their local contexts. EFE-Egypt, for example, has developed a unique experiential learning model, the company simulation model, for its Workplace Success training. A typical course has 20 students divided into three “companies,” each of which is instructed to perform a specific task without being taught the skills needed to complete the task. After they complete the task, the trainer lectures them about the skills needed to complete the task effectively. The “companies” are then asked to complete the task a second time. This experiential learning process allows students to understand their mistakes and practice newly acquired skills in real-time settings. The main goal is for students to develop skills through direct experience so they have the knowledge and confidence to apply the skills on the job. Feedback from participants suggests it is working: “This program is not just a training, it’s a new attitude,” said one graduate; another said, “The soft skills helped us to know ourselves and how to deal with others.”

THE EFE BUSINESS MODEL

Crucial to EFE’s effectiveness in the region are its direct partnerships with busi-

nesses, which ensure that young people are trained to the companies' specifications, and its commitment to measuring success by job outcomes rather than by training numbers alone. An EFE graduate from Jordan looks at it this way: "The others, they train us and throw us in the street. EFE gets us a job."

To begin with, EFE obtains job commitments from its employer partners and identifies their hiring needs. It then either matches its training courses to these needs, or adapts or designs courses to meet them, screens youth participants jointly with the employers, and places youth in jobs with the employer after graduation. Often, on-the-job internships of one to four weeks are included. To ensure that students succeed in their first jobs, EFE gives alumni continuing support, such as mentoring and ongoing professional development. Figure 2 summarizes this end-to-end solution that is built on a partnership with the private sector and skilled local trainers, whom EFE trains and certifies to deliver its courses.

In order to encourage repeat and new employer partners, EFE aims to provide employers with measurable, value-added services. These benefits were in fact noted in the World Education Forum report, "Talent Mobility Good Practice":¹⁴

- Increased recruitment capacity at reduced cost
- Access to a workforce trained in 21st-century skills needed by the business, at a subsidized rate
- Youth with a stronger work ethic, ready to work on the job from day one
- More retainable employees with the capacity to grow at the company
- Ongoing investment in staff at no cost through EFE's alumni program
- Visibility in the press and business community through EFE graduate success stories
- Membership in a network of forward-thinking local, regional, and international companies
- Opportunities to highlight corporate citizenship

EFE encourages employers to become involved by hiring EFE graduates; sponsoring EFE participants as a cost share; engaging employees as volunteers, guest speakers, and mentors for youth; providing input on program design or adapting training courses that respond to hiring needs; participating in the process of selecting youth for EFE's training programs; and donating materials, equipment, and other in-kind contributions.

This business model was tested on a small scale with early employer partners, such as Consolidated Contractors Company, one of the largest construction companies in the Middle East and EFE's partner in Palestine and Jordan; LG, the global appliance and electronics company and EFE partner in Jordan; and Banque Misr, an Egyptian bank and EFE partner in Egypt. Seven years later, the approach has resulted in partnerships with more than one thousand small, medium, large, and multinational businesses that work with EFE to provide first jobs for youth across the region.

Focusing on delivering a high-quality service to employer partners and securing advance job commitments also have yielded compelling results. By the end of

EFE's Performance Measurement and Monitoring & Evaluation Systems

EFE's Performance Measurement (PM) and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Systems are internal mechanisms for identifying the EFE Network's performance in an outcomes framework and collecting feedback from key stakeholders. The performance measurement system tracks EFE's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on both the program and organizational levels. The M&E System is a set of tools and processes to collect in-depth information about the intermediate and long-term outcomes of direct program beneficiaries and to collect information on both programs and partnerships from key stakeholders. The M&E system employs a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods and the tools are a mixture of surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.

The two primary objectives of EFE's performance measurement and M&E systems are to measure program outcomes and to identify appropriate areas for program adjustment. Tracking and analyzing KPIs and data collected through EFE's M&E tools allow staff to understand what is happening with the programs and to identify areas for program improvement, in areas such as program implementation or program design.

Collecting data and feedback through the M&E tools allows for easy comparisons of indicators over time and across sites. Short answer and open-ended questions provide information that can lead to a better understanding of the motivations, behaviors, and perspectives of partners, employers, and students and alumni. This information, captured by the tools as feedback from key stakeholders, can then be used by EFE to identify what is working well and what areas can benefit from adjustment.

Stakeholder Feedback

M&E tools target the following stakeholders:

Partners: Government, civil society and private sector partners who directly or indirectly support EFE programs

Beneficiaries: Directly consisting of the enrolled youth and graduates of EFE programs. Indirectly consisting of the communities, families, and friends of the youth

Trainers: Educators who facilitate in administering EFE courses, activities, and online programs

Mentors or Coaches: Individuals that provide guidance to EFE students or graduates through a formal program in partnership with EFE

Customers or Clients: Individuals or entities that consume the products or services of a business of an EFE entrepreneurship graduate

Key Performance Indicators

EFE's KPIs are tracked by affiliate M&E or program staff on a continuous basis. It is both practical and necessary for accurate outcome to track this data on an

ongoing basis. KPIs are to be reported by the affiliate M&E or program staff to EFE-Global on a quarterly basis via the affiliate program data sheet approximately two weeks after the end of each calendar quarter. Quarterly performance of each affiliate is analyzed, interpreted, and discussed in an affiliate Performance Workshop in which Affiliate CEOs, program and M&E staff, and EFE-Global M&E and Program Managers identify challenges, effective strategies, and learning for program improvement purposes. EFE's KPIs are:

- Programmatic (all disaggregated by gender)
 - Graduation rate
 - 3-month job placement rate
 - 6-month job placement rate
 - 3-month job retention rate
 - Percentage continuously working
- Organization
 - # new partners (general category)
 - # new education partners
 - # new employer partners
 - # active employer partners
 - Percentage of repeat customers (employer partners)
 - \$ amount of contributions from employer partners
 - \$ amount of contributions from the board of directors
 - Percentage of the board of director members making a financial contribution

EFE recognized early on the importance of giving its students a voice in shaping the EFE Network's future programming and services. Some early lessons adopted as a result of graduate feedback include:

- Increasing the emphasis on educating students about the type of jobs they are likely to secure after the training to ensure their interest and commitment
- Highlighting the concept of securing a first job and moving up in the company by stages
- Incorporating language training into the program, such as business English and business French
- Holding employer partners to their commitments to ensure that graduates get the kinds of jobs they were promised and have appropriate work conditions

2011, EFE affiliates had received nearly \$1 million in contributions from employer partners, and in many instances EFE surpassed its target 85 percent job placement rate for its graduates. For example, during its first year of programming in 2009, EFE-Egypt placed 100 percent of its graduates in jobs. The importance to these young people of having a meaningful and secure job quickly became evident. Young alumni would come into the office to donate a percentage of their income

to the program to help their peers have the same opportunity from which they had benefited.

To ensure that it continues to operate innovatively and remains focused on concrete results, EFE, in partnership with experts from New York University, developed internal performance measurement and monitoring & evaluation (PM and M&E) systems with the objective of measuring organizational performance against its targets and identifying program areas needing adjustment.

Some of the early lessons derived from data tracked through EFE's PM and M&E systems relate to the methods used to target and select young people for the program. EFE observed that in some cases applicants did not fit the profile it had identified. This highlighted a need to examine more closely why youth with the intended profile were not applying to EFE, and why EFE's job training and placement programs were in demand by youth with a different profile. Further research into both of these questions led EFE to adjust its recruitment strategies in an effort to target the originally intended population more effectively, and to make slight adjustments to student selection criteria in an effort to serve the population most in need.

EFE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL: IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Seven years of operation have affirmed the importance of EFE's locally based organizational strategy. At the time of EFE's founding, it was common for international organizations to adopt an approach that relied on U.S.-based staff and ownership. In a departure from the norm considered questionable by many at the time, EFE's founding board understood that cultivating local ownership and having "skin in the game" was critical to the organization's mission and ability to reach scale.

EFE has a local leadership, global support model; its business model is implemented across the MENA region through EFE's affiliate network of locally run nonprofits, an organizational structure uncommon in the region. Local ownership of each affiliate drives scale and sustainability. This organizational model supports EFE's market-driven approach. The board of directors of each EFE affiliate is comprised in part by business leaders in their country. This is a key to success for the market-driven approach: board members and their networks provide insights on areas of the economy that offer strong growth potential and opportunities for new jobs backed by employer commitments. These business networks also facilitate EFE's job outcomes approach by providing access to the corporate decision-makers needed to obtain job commitments and sponsorships. EFE asks employer partners to share costs, thereby flipping the standard model of subsidizing training and even employment for underserved entry-level youth who have no job experience.

EFE's global support structure facilitates partnerships that benefit the network across the MENA region, such as a recent regional agreement with the International Finance Corporation to create youth employment opportunities that

will focus on high-potential sectors in the region, such as information and communications technology, hospitality, and construction.

EFE affiliates are able to leverage resources and know-how through the EFE Network, which gives them access to other EFE affiliates across the MENA region as well as support in the United States and Europe. This enables them to replicate their efficient regional partnerships with companies such as Intel, Microsoft, and Manpower Group, and EFE affiliates learn from each other to find keys to success and efficiencies to include in their own country strategies.

The local ownership structure also has engendered interest and good will among prospective supporters and partners. It has tapped into a strong level of commitment among many business leaders and politicians who were eager to contribute to their community and nation. This was underscored most recently after the Tunisian revolution in 2011, when EFE was asked to establish its newest affiliate, EFE-Tunisie. As former Tunisian minister of employment, Said Aidi said at the time, “any number of international organizations are coming to Tunisia with funding and a desire to help...but EFE is the only one talking about creating a *Tunisian* [emphasis added] nonprofit dedicated to youth employment.”

With an eye toward creating a “tipping point” for youth employment in the MENA region, EFE has become involved in knowledge sharing to publicize and expedite the adoption of youth employment solutions, as well as to learn new approaches and methods from others. In 2013, the World Economic Forum’s Policy Guide to Scaling Social Innovation featured EFE as a case study in social enterprise. It described the innovations that led to EFE’s success, including the importance of maintaining a razor-sharp focus on what you do best and the need for buy-in at the local level.¹⁵ The seminal report, “Education for Employment: Realizing Arab Youth Potential,” which was prepared in 2011 by the International Finance Corporation and the Islamic Development Bank based on research by McKinsey & Company, profiled EFE as a best practice for work-readiness program within the MENA region and highlights the following conditions for success: having a close relationship with business that provides a good understanding of the private sector’s expectations and business needs, flexible education and delivery options, and a guarantee of employment.¹⁶ More important than the kudos for EFE, however, are a growing understanding and recognition of the importance of demand-driven skill-building and the close public-private partnerships needed to scale solutions.

GETTING TO SCALE: EMERGING LESSONS

With locally run affiliates already on the ground before the Arab Spring, EFE has grown exponentially in the past few years. To date, the EFE Network has placed 3,300 youth in jobs, nearly 40 percent of them young women, with job retention at nearly 80 percent. Partnerships with the U.S. Department of State Middle East Partnership Initiative, Manpower Group, Intel, Microsoft, Abraaj Group, Accenture, The MasterCard Foundation, the Drosos Foundation, and more than

one thousand employer partners, as well as education providers and local government ministries, have made this possible.

This early success affirmed EFE's approach and set the stage for growth, both in scaling-up in countries where operations were already in place and in expanding to new countries with a large youth population, high unemployment, and a skills gap that could be addressed by EFE's model. EFE pursued, and carefully evaluated, opportunities for both of these growth strategies and had a clear plan in place by 2011, when it created a new locally run affiliate organization in Tunisia, its sixth country of operations, and embarked on a national expansion project in Morocco.

The Morocco expansion project presented a new set of challenges and lessons learned, and it serves as a model for EFE and others in a similar context for scaling-up programs and operations. With support from The MasterCard Foundation, EFE set out to scale-up its operations and programming in the Grand Casablanca area and to introduce programming in five new regions in the country. To reach these greater numbers and get the model to scale, EFE needed to cultivate a broad range of stakeholders and leverage public-private partnerships, including the public education institutions and governments with which it is partnering to achieve systemic change in national education systems.

Over a four-year period, EFE-Maroc, aims to train 15,500 youth: 3,000 unemployed university graduates are currently receiving training in hard and soft skills and then will be linked to a career-building job while 12,500 young people receive training in work readiness skills—such as how to effectively conduct a job search, prepare a CV, and succeed in a job interview—through the *Finding a Job Is a Job* (FJIJ) curriculum provided by EFE partner Manpower Group. For EFE-Maroc, which was established in 2007 and had trained just 560 youth before the national expansion in 2011, this scale-up was monumental.

Built into this national scale-up and expansion project is a more rigorous evaluation by external evaluation firms to provide an independent assessment of the program's (and, by extension, the model's) strengths and weaknesses, and to generate lessons related to relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability that will inform implementation and strategy throughout the life of the project and beyond. Equally important to informing EFE program implementation and strategy is informing the broader field on what has been learned and what works in addressing youth employment and economic opportunities. Some evaluation questions to be answered include:

- What are the most essential elements of the model for equipping youth with relevant skills for the workplace and achieving the target employment outcomes?
- Is the profile of youth targeted by the program appropriate and relevant to program objectives? To what extent have the program's methodologies and curricula been integrated into the local education system?
- Has the program effectively incorporated cross-cutting approaches (e.g., partnership, gender, civic engagement)?
- What are the main drivers of cost and to what extent can the program be consid-

ered cost-effective?

- What is the best approach to scale-up the model effectively and efficiently?

To achieve scale, EFE-Maroc is leveraging its partnerships with local governmental institutions, the private sector, and local education institutions. It has been providing training at community centers run by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, as well as integrating soft skills training into the curricula of Hassan II University. EFE-Maroc has worked with Souktel and other technology partners to increase efficiency in effectively delivering all stages of the training program—from recruiting the target population to following up with graduates once they've begun working—and in reaching thousands of youth.

As EFE wrestled with the challenges of a national expansion, it encountered a number of growing pains. Partnerships did not always result in the expected outcomes, for example, and staffing capacity often was in flux. The organization responded by asking board members to redouble their commitment to the work, engaging more deeply with employers, and adjusting student selection criteria and recruitment strategies, which yielded necessary but appropriate modifications in policies and placement rates.

Two years into its national expansion project, EFE and its partners are seeing significant results. Nearly 3,500 youth have successfully completed training, with more than 900 having completed the hard and soft skills employability training. Sixty-eight percent of graduates have been placed in a career-building job within the first six months after completing training. EFE-Maroc has expanded into three of the five planned regions thus far, an experience that has generated a number of lessons, most notably:

- A scale-up and national expansion of this magnitude should be carried out in the context of strong partnerships with local institutions, including government ministries, the private sector, and local community and business leaders.
- The implementing organization must have the capacity—talent, expertise, and resources—and readiness to carry out all aspects of the project.
- Stakeholders must be willing to adapt to current conditions—both internal and external—while maintaining their commitment to the ultimate program objectives.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: THE SCALING CHALLENGE

The youth employment crisis in the Middle East and North Africa requires an urgent response. And, in fact, while the MENA region is saddled with the world's highest youth unemployment rates and a very young demographic, the crisis of youth unemployment has now gone global, affecting developed and developing countries alike.

Over the last several years, much has been written about the importance of reorienting economic growth models to be jobs-centered and to have an additional focus on youth employment, since young people are, on average, almost three times as likely as adults to be unemployed.

Institutions including the World Bank, International Labor Organization, UNESCO, and the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation, as well as Mercer Consulting and McKinsey & Company, have produced cogent reports about the factors contributing to youth unemployment and the policies and practices that will help address the deepening crisis. As the McKinsey “Education to Employment” report reveals, the problem “is not that success is impossible or unknowable—it is that it is scattered and small scale compared with the need.”¹⁷ Contributing to and exacerbating this problem is a development model that is still primarily project based and donor driven, instead of being focused on outcomes and impact and driven by indigenous leaders and organizations.

From EFE’s own work in Morocco and elsewhere across the MENA region, it is clear that when different sector constituents “step into each other’s world,” progress accelerates and more young people benefit. But, this approach has to go beyond a specific initiative or project framework. Government actors, private-sector employers, education providers, and civil-sector organizations need to come together to take bold action at the industry, region, and country levels and make commitments for which they are held accountable.

One can envision how to scale-up effective educational supports if the right leaders come together to make serious commitments. The rapid development of online learning approaches and platforms shows great promise to help scale quality training and skills. New simulation-based technologies and serious games are emerging that can help recreate the practical, hands-on learning experience that so many young people lack and that EFE implements in a classroom setting with soft skills training and case study modalities, combined with on-the-job internships. Less clear is how to scale the employer or demand side of the equation in the MENA region. However, similar market-driven experiences in other parts of the world show how this may be possible.

In India, for example, IL&FS Skills, a for-profit venture, operates 18 skills schools and 355 skills centers in 24 states, offering one to three months of instruction in 27 trades, including textiles, welding, and hospitality. It is part of the government-funded National Skill Development Corporation and involves some one thousand partner companies that commit to hiring graduates. Industry partners help to design the training curriculum, which emphasizes learning by doing in simulated workshops. To deliver high-quality, consistent information to large numbers at lower cost, IL&FS uses blended training consisting of technology and in-person faculty components. IL&FS also measures students’ performance at least one year after they leave the training.¹⁸ Here we see the major stakeholders—government, private sector, and educational institutions—designing a system that creates clear incentives for youth, together with private-sector commitments and involvement in curriculum design, bolstered by government support.

In the MENA region, EFE has established an organizational and programmatic platform that, with the right resources and partners, is eminently scalable. Doing so will entail developing partnerships with consortia of companies in priority growth sectors (e.g., tourism, hospitality, construction, ICT) and require resources

to invest in curriculum development and training capacity, as well as subsidies for those young people without the means to pay for high-quality training linked to jobs. EFE is certainly ready to meet the challenge and to work with others who share the same objectives. Although the overall challenge is daunting, every day brings a new reminder of how transformative a first job and a new lease on life can be. In the words of a graduate from EFE's Jordanian affiliate JCEF, "Taking the JCEF course—it was a milestone for me, in my life, it changed everything for me. It gave me an opportunity to get a good career, a good payment, a good salary, a good opportunity to support my family, myself. I helped my two brothers and one sister graduate college."

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