

Career Guidance Partnership Conference in Jordan
December 15 and 16, 2009

Background Paper

**Career Guidance: a Tool to Help Jordanians Participate
Effectively in the Labour Market**

“The fallout from gaps between people’s skills and workforce needs includes enormous costs in social spending: on education, health care, social services, protection and correctional services, and more. Equally staggering is the loss of revenue to employers and governments.” (Phil Jarvis, 2003)

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE JORDANIAN LABOUR FORCE

A powerful influence on the economic health of a labour market is the correct matching of employee skills and talents to the requirements of a job. Jarvis (2003), Watts (2004), Diamantopoulou (2000) and Hughes (2004) all emphasize the serious impact of job-worker match on productivity in organizations and on a country's GDP.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that “OECD countries are increasingly recognizing the importance of lifelong learning and active employment policies as tools of economic growth and social equity. OECD has identified effective career information and guidance systems as essential to support the implementation of these policies and to provide all citizens with the opportunity to develop career self-management skills.”

Career Guidance in Jordan

It has been recognized that the most significant problem plaguing the economic status and development of Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa is that of unemployment, particularly among the youth. The costs are severe in both economic and psychological terms: long term effects of poverty, depression, anxiety, and hopelessness caused by unemployment. The stability of this region is contingent upon the successful resolution of unemployment, underemployment, and youth unemployment, whereby improving the lives of millions of young people, and maintaining economic and social stability for the region.

The first in a series of projects aimed at the implementation for a sustainable solution to these problems is the development of career guidance services: career counselling, career education and career and labour market information.

However, because career guidance is so new to Jordan, counsellors lack professional career guidance training and provide their counselling without sufficient use of career and labor market information.

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Despite this, MOE counsellors have made efforts to develop and provide some career counselling ideas and develop career counselling manuals. Funded pilots and projects such as Save the Children's School-to-Work project and INJAZ project were two successful but non-permanent projects within schools.

Universities started career guidance services very late. Just a few years ago they adopted the joint initiative of Al Manar and King Abdullah Fund for Development (KAFD) to start the career counselling services and to establish career counselling centers. The development of career counselling manuals, systems, tests, and training for counsellors, graduates and students were entrusted to the Al Manar project at the National Center for Human Resources Development (NCHRD). Again, the follow-through on many of these activities is unsustainable due to lack of funding and administrative support from education institutions.

The employment services in the Ministry of Labor were not well established and the career counselling services and vocational guidance almost nonexistent; however in the last few years, they have developed plans to recruit and train career counsellors for their offices.

Temporary projects and activities in the field of career guidance have taken place in several different sectors. In spite of positive results, knowledge of these efforts most often remains within the specific sector and often the programs fade away for lack of funds. In relation to the country's vast need for such services, there remains a lack of comprehensive, co-ordinated and sustainable services that have a national impact. There is no clear, unified policy in place that ensures that career guidance services continue or that those providing such services have the necessary support to sustain their work.

In response to the lack of unified efforts, Al Manar/NCHRD has invited all relevant stakeholders to a conference regarding the state of career guidance in the country. The meeting will bring together figures from ministries, donor organizations, NGOs, private sector representatives and concerned citizens.

In the two-day, December Conference, Al Manar Project/NCHRD hopes that major stakeholders will champion the connections between career development, a strong labour force and a thriving economy by contributing to the creation of:

- a vision for career guidance policy and governance in Jordan
- an outline of a proposed national structure that will ensure national leadership, meaningful co-ordination, and sustainability for career development services and policy.

Consultation

In preparation for this Conference, Al Manar conducted consultations with the stakeholders through interviews, a survey, and focus groups. The goal was to discuss the main challenges people are facing when integrating into the labour market and their needs regarding career decision-making and job search. Several groups of people were consulted such as school and university counsellors, students, parents, Ministry of

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Education representatives, Ministry of Labour representatives, employed and unemployed citizens, teachers, private sector employers and funders. Following are some key findings from these consultations.

Overall, the consultation revealed a need for nation-wide understanding of what Career Guidance is and how it spans all sectors and all phases of life. Lack of occupational knowledge, lack of skills for integrating or reintegrating the labour market, confusion with regard to career decision-making, and unorganized job search were identified as challenges by all groups. Supports needed included teachers and counsellors with expanded career guidance knowledge at both secondary and post-secondary levels, families with more knowledge of the labour market, and accessible and knowledgeable service providers to help unemployed workers return to work. Moreover, when asked what people need for an easier integration into the labour market the groups suggested: *a better understanding of Career Guidance and Employment Counselling; Career Guidance in every school/university; employment counselling for job seekers; Professional Career Guidance and Employment Counsellors; Partnership with the Private Sector; and a better integration of women into the labour market*

While the school counsellors said that their job description includes providing career guidance to students, most of them do not have the time to provide this service and do not have specific training/diploma in career guidance. There also appear to be discrepancies between the perceptions of the survey respondents in how much help they provide to students and the perceptions of the interviewees and the focus group participants on how much help is received.

It appears that a healthy service implementation will involve certain basic knowledge and attitudes that have yet to be developed in most sectors. The knowledge and attitudes include the recognition of:

- the importance of interactive learning
- the importance of parent-student communication and acknowledgement of student interests and talents
- the value of applied learning
- the value of well-trained career counsellors
- need for more freedom and less bureaucratic barriers in hiring decisions, curriculum decisions, and university application procedures.

Generally speaking, it was agreed that people, both clients and service providers, do not know **what** information would be useful in decision-making regarding career choices, **where** this information is available, and **how** it could be used to support thinking around work and education.

The consultations indicate that there is a consumer need for more career guidance and an expressed desire by organizations to share their activities and hear what others are doing. The responses indicated that there is no place for stakeholders to turn for consolidated information on labour market information, accessibility to best practices information on worker training, career guidance, counsellor training, and student placement programs. This is a clear sign of a need for strategic leadership for co-ordination of knowledge and activities in the sector.

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The findings from the consultations, added to some important facts regarding the Labour Market, Career Decision-Making and Public Policy in Jordan, will provide useful information to stimulate our discussion in the next two days.

A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) investigative project in Jordan revealed incongruity between new entries to the labour force and the demands of the labour market. *Assessment of Gaps between Knowledge/Skills Acquired through Higher Education and Labour Market Demands in Jordan* is a report on a comprehensive assessment of the skills and knowledge acquired by graduates of universities and trends in labour market demands in two fields. The study explored available Employment Support Services (ESS) for university graduates in Jordan. The project's conclusions included:

- There is no systematic provision of labour market information, which limits the decision-making ability of universities when revising, redesigning or restructuring course majors.
- Significant gaps exist between academic institutions and the private sector both in terms of structures and programmes and the links remain inconsistent and unregulated.
- Guidance for school and university graduates in their choice of career path is limited.
- Lack of Universities' specialization; positioning and proper information on their rating.
- Employers use their experience to build their own perception about graduates without referring to statistical information.
- Gender stereotyping exists in the choice of specializations, such as IT

(Support to Bridging the Gap between Higher Education and the Labour Market in Jordan - Phase II).

As the National Strategy steers Jordan to share in a global, information economy and to produce knowledge workers to compete in this economy, the lifelong learning and career/employment services will need to be woven into the support and training for the labour force *and* their employers.

THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTION

One of the problems identified in the pre-conference consultations was that few people know exactly what career guidance is; some think of it as providing lists of job opportunities, some think of it as giving occupational information, some think of it as helping choose a university specialty from the options given from tawjihi results. Very few recognize the operational definition of career guidance:

“Life-Long Career Guidance and Counselling help individuals of all ages choose between the full range of available education, training and employment opportunities. It enables them to make educated decisions about career opportunities and gives individuals clarity as to what they want to pursue in their lives which in turn helps people focus and decide on what

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abilities they need to develop. This is easier to achieve when interests and values become congruent, which in turn leads individuals to greater fulfilment and satisfaction”.

The following facts on education completion, program and occupational choice in Jordan suggest ineffective choices by students and job seekers. At the same time research on career guidance suggests that comprehensive career guidance services could make a positive difference for education and employment choices and successful integration into the labour market.

Career Decision-Making

- Studies show that career development is important for increased academic success and also:
 - increases motivation to learn after high school;
 - reduces numbers of dropouts (both at the secondary and post-secondary level).
- Career information is a key factor in effective career decision-making. Skills for finding and applying LMI to decisions provide citizens with career self-management skills for their entire careers. The above fact demonstrates the importance of learning to consider both supply and demand factors.
- Research in the field of career development shows that work experiences and experiential learning are extremely valuable in making career decisions.
- For example, in a North American study, 88% of post-secondary students with practical experience in their program had a specific plan or were deciding between two options, compared to 67% who did not have the same practical experience (Archer, 2004).
- There are no professional specializations/programs in colleges or universities in career development or career guidance.

These facts and corresponding career research reveal the need for nationally expanded and improved competencies in career decision-making. The issues can't be solved in isolation. Students can't go on work experiences without the consent and co-operation of employers, school authorities and parents. Students and workers cannot use Labour Market Information (LMI) to assist with decisions unless governments and business co-operate to provide accessible, reliable, valid LMI.

Alminawi (2007), in an unpublished Al Manar paper, draws attention to the lack of understanding of what career development is in all sectors at all levels in Jordan. She identifies the need to create a 'culture' and understanding of career development in order to go forward. Only by working across the spectrum from school to career, collaborating with schools, universities, employment centers, families, etc. can Jordan unite in a career guidance vision and create meaningful pathways for individuals. This will be done through meaningful resource development, extensive training of core teams

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of counsellors, forming associations of career guidance practice, building partnerships with the private sector, and the launching of an awareness campaign that can define clear media messages to reach the public.

The way to effectively carry out such activities is through partnerships, policy and persistence.

THE PARTNERSHIP CONNECTION

Without the partnerships, policies stall or become ineffective. A majority of pre-conference consultation respondents held a common belief in a co-ordinated effort to create partnerships so that they are all benefitting and complementing each other's work. They expressed that working jointly and reciprocally will help them achieve the sustainability they all seek for career development at a personal and on a national level.

In fact, Jordan has developed many policies to advance education and job choice. In viewing a few of them below, the will to help all citizens be successful is evident. To go beyond the will to help, all stakeholders must combine their efforts and impress on those in a position to contribute that *implementation of policy* is a major criteria for success.

Each of the examples of Jordanian policy is encouraging and a step forward. The next step involves actively working with stakeholders to foster shared communication and collaboration between groups. Such a united effort is likely to connect career guidance services across the lifespan of transitions for Jordanian students and workers.

Conclusion

It is evident that effective action cannot be taken without the development of a clear vision of Career Guidance Services and the creation and maintenance of partnerships across sectors and interest groups to contribute to the formation, implementation and sustainability of quality Career Guidance services.

Career Guidance in Jordan is at a very early stage. Pre-conference consultations indicated that benefits of career guidance are recognized by representatives at all levels of Jordanian society. To effectively implement career guidance services there needs to be an open attitude and willingness to change the status quo.

Jordan has the capacity and the concern for its citizens to make this happen. However it is never fast and not easy. Jordan also needs patient and persistent leaders, committed to action, in order to reap the benefits for its labour market and improve the life of every citizen.

INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Ronald G. Sultana is a Professor of Sociology and of Comparative Education at the University of Malta, where he is Director of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research, and founding editor of the Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies. He carried out his doctoral studies in New Zealand, and was Fulbright Scholar at Stanford University. His research focuses on the relation between education and the world of work, and he has published extensively on vocational education and training, and on career guidance. He has been consultant to various Ministries in the European Union and the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as to such international organizations as UNESCO, UNICEF, the European Training Foundation, and the ILO. Further details about Professor Sultana's work are available at <http://www.um.edu.mt/emcer> Email: ronald.sultana@um.edu.mt

Professor Tony Watts is a British Professor of Career Development at two UK universities and an international policy consultant in career guidance and career development. He holds degrees in History (Cambridge) and Sociology (York). He is a Founding Fellow and Life President of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling, Cambridge, UK, and a joint-founder of CRAC (also based in Cambridge).

Mr. Helmut Zelloth is an Austrian Senior Human Capital Development Specialist working with the European Training Foundation (ETF). He holds a Master's degree in philosophy, psychology and pedagogy and geography with economic focus. In the field of Career Guidance he has coordinated policy reviews with local and international experts in 11 candidate and acceding countries to the European Union, in 7 Western Balkan and 10 Mediterranean countries. He is the author of the publication "In Demand: Career Guidance in EU Neighbouring Countries".

Mr. Bader Zamareh is a Palestinian Youth Leader, working as an Executive Director for Sharek Youth Forum. He obtained a Master's degree in Law from al-Quds University, and has been involved in various activities focused on young people, particularly those related to Career Guidance. In the past five years he has been involved in the set-up of 8 Career Centers in Palestinian universities. Mr. Zamareh advocates, at the decision-maker's level, for a National Policy on youth employment.

Elaine O'Reilly is a senior consultant for the Canadian Career Development Foundation. She has a Master's degree in Adult Education and Counselling from the University of Toronto. Her work at the Foundation has included the development of national labour market information resources, work with sector councils on skill development and national training initiatives, research reports and strategies on career awareness for recruitment and retention of non-traditional workers. The author of *Making Career Sense of Labour Market Information*, Elaine has served on national advisory boards on labour market information and skill development and is presently on the research team for a national study on the Impact of LMI on Career Decision-making. Elaine has recently provided career counsellor training and consultations in Jordan.

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Céline Renald works as a senior consultant for the Canadian Career Development Foundation. She has a Master's degree in Andragogy from the University of Montreal. She was co-chair at the National Symposium on Career Development, Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development and at the International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy. She is a member of the Canadian Research Working Group on Evidence Based Practice in Career Development. An adult educator by training, she managed the Government of Canada's competency-based training program for employment counsellors (HRDC). She also participated in consulting projects for employment service development in Russia, Malaysia and Jordan.