

CLOSING THE HOPE GAP:

Findings from a Rapid Community
Appraisal of Youth in al-Fayhaa Union
of Municipalities, North Lebanon

EXECUTIVE VERSION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Youth for Work: Tripoli Alliance project (YWT) seeks to create an environment that expands employment and civic engagement opportunities for Lebanon's most vulnerable youth.

The YWT initiative results from a formal alliance of organizations that came together with the express intention to improve the lives of youth ages 15–24 who are out of school and out of work in Tripoli, el-Mina, and Beddawi. The YWT Alliance comprises the following members:

- Arab Urban Development Institute/Middle East and North Africa Child and Youth Initiative;
- Municipality of Tripoli
- Al-Fayhaa Union of Municipalities;
- Higher Council of Childhood;
- International Youth Foundation (IYF); and
- Young Men's Christian Association of Lebanon (YMCA).

With funding from the World Bank, our efforts will build the capacity of local actors to:

- Increase young people's access to life, employability, and entrepreneurial skills training;
- Expand civic engagement opportunities for youth;
- Improve youth employability and civic engagement models, practices, and policies relevant to the Lebanese context.

YWT is committed to working from the grassroots to design and expand the availability of effective services for at-risk youth based on their educational, social, civic engagement, and employment needs.

To ensure that YWT activities address challenges and opportunities specific to Tripoli, el-Mina, and Beddawi, the YWT Alliance conducted a rapid community appraisal (RCA) in these communities. The RCA consisted of in-depth surveys and focus groups with young people, as well as interviews and focus groups with parents and community leaders. In addition to collecting qualitative and quantitative data from local neighborhoods, the RCA also drew upon reports from the United Nations Development Programme and the Central Administration of Statistics of the Government of Lebanon.

The RCA report portrays a mix of challenges facing young people in the greater Tripoli region, such as poverty, low educational levels, undeveloped life and job skills, high unemployment, and a dearth of opportunities to use their free time productively. The report makes concrete recommendations on how to address these challenges and turn young people's hopes and aspirations into reality. The recommendations will serve as the basis for community-based demonstration projects incorporating best-practice youth employment and civic engagement programming. These demonstration projects will be implemented in each of the three target localities by members of the Social Safety Network of Community-Based Organizations and in close coordination with YWT and youth. Many of the recommendations listed in this report will be implemented in greater Tripoli and throughout Lebanon on a phased-in basis, resources permitting.

The RCA resulted in a number of recommendations that fall outside the scope of work envisioned by YWT. We include them for consideration by policymakers and others working on youth issues in Lebanon. RCA findings help build the case for close coordination among the many stakeholders in Lebanon to effectively address the needs of the nation's youth.

The RCA's Main Findings

Characteristics of the Target Neighborhoods

The average family size in the three surveyed communities (6.7 persons) was larger than the national average (4.3 persons) and was even higher than the average for North Lebanon (4.7 persons). The level of education achieved by parents in the three target communities was very low: 75% of parents had not completed 12th grade. Incomes were also very low in the three municipalities. According to the RCA, the average daily income was LL 6,844 (\$4.59) in Tripoli, LL 5,367 (\$3.60) in el-Mina, and LL 6,874 (\$4.61) in Beddawi.¹

Levels of Education and Training Among Youth

The RCA showed that only half of the youth surveyed were enrolled in formal education. More than half (54%) of surveyed youth who were not enrolled in school left after completing basic education (9th grade), and 11% dropped out before finishing basic education. Approximately 60% of dropouts in all regions were male. Most were illiterate or semiliterate, which greatly restricts their access to employment.

Youth leave school before completing their secondary education for many reasons. The most commonly stated reason in all three municipalities was that the youth had no interest in education, or they found it useless.

Life, Employability, and Entrepreneurial Skills for the 21st Century

At-risk youth require the technical training and life skills to adapt to a changing work environment and to meet the evolving needs of the local labor market. The active participation of women in the labor market is also a YWT priority.

RCA findings show that 33% of youth ages 15–24 were working, 16% were unemployed, and 49% were economically inactive (neither working nor looking for work). The majority of economically inactive youth were in school, though 16% of inactive youth stated that they could not work or chose not to work. Among unemployed youth, 43% had sought work, unsuccessfully, for more than 6 months. Men had a much higher rate of employment compared with women (19% and 8%, respectively). In addition, the RCA found that:

- 64% of working youth were paid less than the minimum wage; and
- 56% worked more than 40 hours per week.

The RCA identified several obstacles facing young jobseekers in the targeted municipalities. A significant percentage of youth said that they were unemployed primarily because they did not know where to find a job or they did not have any career guidance help. Many reported that they could not find a job in their academic field or area of vocational training. Youth and parents reported stigma associated with vocational training. In addition, a gap exists between labor market needs and the skills of youth.

Recommendations

- Education at the technical and university levels should include practical experience that responds to local market needs.
- Provide life skills and other personal training to help youth become engaged in and positive about their formal education.
- Improve the perception of vocational training as a pathway to a rewarding career.
- Teach youth about their rights in the workplace, particularly as they pertain to working conditions and equal opportunities for youth and women.
- Encourage greater parental involvement in the educational process; enlist the support of parents to encourage youth to return to school and to stay in school.
- Integrate career exploration and counseling into formal education to help young people gain accurate information about job prospects and begin matching their career interests with the knowledge and skills required for these careers.

¹ All dollars refer to U.S. dollars.

Labor Market Appraisal

Over 90% of businesses in al-Fayhaa Union of Municipalities are small (under five employees), and they operate in the informal sector without government monitoring or regulation. Trades and services comprise the majority of the economy. The agricultural sector is small and seasonal, and most workers are non-Lebanese. The construction sector also relies on low-paid non-Lebanese workers. The number of jobs declined from 1996 to 2004 and continues to fall because of political insecurity, which adversely affected businesses in the target area.

Despite these challenges, the RCA found that there is a high potential for youth employment in certain sectors, including the tourism, entertainment, and artisan industries. In addition, many small businesses indicated a need for staff with training in new technologies.

Almost half of the businesses surveyed (46%) did not require a high level of education to fill vacancies. Employers emphasized the importance of seriousness and experience for youth who want to apply for vacant posts.

Recommendations

- Develop job-training programs in coordination with local and regional development strategies.
- Use labor market data to guide the job-training process.
- Provide an integrated and comprehensive life and employability training with technical and non-technical aspects.
- Find innovative ways to overcome work-related gender disparities.
- Develop entrepreneurship skills among youth.

Youth-Friendly Services

The RCA investigated the availability of services in the target communities, including social safety net initiatives, health care, cultural and leisure, sports, employment, and after-school education. The survey also asked youth for their perspectives on these services. Youth centers, healthcare centers, parks, playgrounds, informal education, and cultural and sports programs were better known to youth than other services, such as social services and employment agencies. Most youth expressed moderate satisfaction with services available in their areas. The RCA found that only 15% of target youth in all municipalities used available services. In all regions, youth used health services the most.

The RCA found that young men tended not to use their time productively, and young women stayed home to help with housework. Youth and parents expressed an interest in improved recreation and leisure opportunities for youth. Young people and their families expressed a desire for sports facilities and other venues that would offer young people opportunities to use their time beneficially.

Recommendations

- Identify best practices in the provision of youth-friendly service delivery.
- Train service providers in best practices for youth-friendly programming.
- Increase youth opportunities to participate in cultural and athletic activities.
- Offer collateral services that promote relevant workplace behaviors.

Youth Civic Engagement

The RCA found that the level of youth involvement in civic activities in target areas is low; on average, only 15% of surveyed youth participate in civic engagement activities. Among youth who identify themselves as being civically engaged, 74% do not participate regularly.

Most youth participating in focus groups expressed their enthusiasm about volunteer activities as a way to serve their local communities and to gain experience. However, young people and parents in target areas said that volunteer associations have failed to communicate with, recruit, and motivate youth to be a part of a culture of volunteerism.

Recommendations

- Motivate youth to participate in volunteer activities of any kind, and design civic engagement projects with their active participation.
- Promote opportunities for civic engagement to youth.
- Engage parents and other stakeholders in the development of civic engagement opportunities.
- Use civic engagement and volunteer opportunities to help youth build skills.

Quality of Life Concerns

The RCA asked youth to identify issues that are most important to them and which may pose a threat to their lives or wellbeing, such as smoking, violence, drug abuse, and crime. Smoking—both cigarettes and hubble bubbles (water pipes)—was the most prevalent problem identified by youth (64%), followed by community violence, and then alcohol use. Youth see these issues as directly affecting their education, family, and social lives. Youth were less concerned about issues such as crime and drug abuse. Youth reported that factors such as unemployment, economic and political conditions, and a lack of security and safety in some neighborhoods contributed to unhealthy behaviors.

The RCA asked youth to rate their sense of optimism as a general measure of their belief in their ability to control their own lives, make decisions, and deal with pressures and challenges. In general, 65% of youth in the target municipalities are optimistic.

Recommendations

- Make life skills training widely available to youth so that they can respond better to stressful situations and develop optimum healthy behaviors.
- Increase youth access to activities that allow them to use their time productively.
- Implement an anti-smoking campaign to educate youth on the risks of smoking.
- Promote interaction, dialogue, teamwork, and youth participation in social and cultural activities.
- Develop sports programs for young people to encourage healthy activities and boost self-confidence.

CONCLUSIONS

Like young people everywhere, youth in al-Fayhaa Union of Municipalities seek a life in which they have a quality education, a good job, a chance to participate in their communities, and a sense of safety and security in their lives. Although the RCA found that youth in target communities face challenges to staying in school, getting decent jobs, and being positively engaged in their communities, employment opportunities and services are already available—or soon will be—within these same communities.

A key finding in the RCA is the extent to which young people exhibited a willingness to take advantage of employment-related opportunities. Youth in the YWT target communities expressed genuine enthusiasm about becoming more positively engaged in their communities, if given a chance. YWT intends to harness these promising conditions and positive youth attitudes.



Arab Urban Development Institute/Middle East and North Africa Child and Youth Initiative (AUDI/MENACYI) is a regional, nongovernmental organization that focuses on upgrading the capacities of local authorities and municipalities throughout the Middle East and North Africa region. Its Child Protection Initiative strives to improve the well being of children and to enhance knowledge of effective policies and programs that address issues critical to children in the region. To learn more, visit www.araburban.org



The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Lebanon is a national development organization dedicated to improving the mind, body, and spirit of all Lebanese people regardless of religion, political affiliation, color, or creed. To learn more, visit www.ymca-leb.org.lb



Al-Fayhaa Union of Municipalities (FUM) comprises the municipalities of Tripoli, el-Mina, and Beddawi. FUM works to improve the quality of life of all citizens living within its boundaries. To learn more, visit www.urbcmfayhaa.gov.lb



The Higher Council of Childhood (HCC), housed within the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, is an interdisciplinary council made of up representatives from several Government of Lebanon ministries and nongovernmental and international organizations. HCC implements the general principles of children's rights in order to improve the situation of children in Lebanon, ensuring their rights to survival, development, and protection. To learn more, visit www.atfalouna.gov.lb/en/Home.aspx



The **International Youth Foundation (IYF)** invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil-society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.

To learn more, visit www.iyf.org



The **Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI)**, founded in 1980, located in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is a regional, non-governmental organization. AUDI is the technical and scientific arm of the Arab Towns Organization (ATO), has an active membership of more than 400 Arab cities and towns representing 22 Arab states. A major goal of the Institute is the enhancement of the quality of municipal services in Arab towns and cities. This is achieved through professional and technical support to municipalities, and municipal officials and administrators. The Institute is also dedicated to the improvement and preservation of the character and heritage of Arab Towns. To learn more, visit www.araburban.org