

TRANSITIONS TO WORK: Advancing Career Education in Secondary Schools in Palestine

The Youth Entrepreneurship Development (YED) program is a five-year, US\$15 million initiative funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) West Bank and Gaza Mission. YED's goal is to improve employability and entrepreneurship opportunities for young Palestinians, ages 14 to 29, by partnering with public, private, and civil society sector institutions. Through strong partnerships with local Palestinian youth-serving institutions, the program supports high-quality, results-oriented, and sustainable livelihood initiatives to address the needs of Palestinian youth.

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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.

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THE EARLIER YOUTH GAIN ACCESS TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES— and begin planning viable career paths—the better equipped they are to pursue relevant educational, training, volunteer, and employment experiences that advance and reinforce their goals.

To ensure greater numbers of Palestinian youth have access to career development and decision-making opportunities at the secondary-school level, the *Youth Entrepreneurship Development* (YED) program launched the *School to Career* (StC) initiative in 2012. In its first two years, StC provided more than 5,380 students at 54 secondary schools in the West Bank with a comprehensive package of activities designed to equip youth to make informed career decisions and plan their professional and academic futures.

A five-year program of the International Youth Foundation, YED was created with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve employability and entrepreneurship opportunities for young Palestinians, ages 14 to 29, by partnering with public, private, and civil society sector institutions. Toward this end, StC is being implemented in collaboration with the Palestine Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), the Community Development and Continuing Education Institute (CDCE-I) at Palestine Ahlyeh University College (PAUC), and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training League (TVET). Critical to its role is increasing the capacity of youth-serving professionals and organizations to deliver quality career guidance services well into the future.

Reinforcing the need for such services, IYF Country Director for Palestine Mohammed AIMbaid explains: “The field of career guidance is still very nascent in Palestine and in the Middle East as a whole. Across the board, educational providers at the high school and university levels lack systematic approaches and best practices to help young people make informed decisions about their futures.”

Results to date speak to both the need for StC's approach and its impact on both students and career counselors. Eight out of ten student beneficiaries had decided their career path by the end of the program, with two-thirds crediting StC with being able to make that decision, and more than 90 percent of participating counselors reported strengthened capacity to deliver quality services.



ABOUT THE SCHOOL TO CAREER PROGRAM

To enhance students' understanding of and exposure to the world of work, the StC program features a variety of interventions, including: in-class lessons from an IYF-developed StC toolkit; psychometric assessments; in-school presentations by employers, university representatives, and entrepreneurs; job shadowing at civil society, public, and private sector employers, and field visits to a variety of professional and academic institutions. To date, the program has been implemented in six communities, including: Bethlehem, Northern Hebron, Jericho, Jerusalem, Nablus, and Jenin.

Assessing student interests and skills and supporting their career education through a specially-designed curriculum are key elements of the StC approach. To ensure quality student self-assessment, in 2012, IYF partnered with Silatech, the Qatari-based social enterprise, to provide certification and access to its Tamheed online psychometric assessment that provides an analysis of youth and job seekers' personalities and suitable career paths. Tamheed's four assessments measure each candidate's cognitive ability (e.g., literacy, numeracy, personality, and professional preference). In addition, IYF produced a Career Education Toolkit for grades 11 and 12 based on

curricula developed by Save the Children targeting grades 8, 9, and 10, and endorsed by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The toolkit is designed to help students achieve self-awareness, identify labor market opportunities, and interact through in-class group activities and individual exercises to identify and plan a career path. The toolkit consists of five components: Self Awareness, Getting Ready to Learn and Work, Exploring Opportunities, Entrepreneurship, and Career Planning.

To support the program's quality implementation, sustainability, and scalability, StC also provided materials, training, and coaching to MoEHE staff, including counselors, supervisors, and department heads. Throughout the first two years of the program, YED supported training and professional development for 100 counselors on the implementation of the StC toolkit in-class activities, including 19 counselors who received training and were qualified as trainers to enable the MoEHE to train other counselors that were not reached and for the program to continue after YED support for the project ends in October 2014.

Moreover, 78 supervisors and department heads were trained to promote quality service provision and program monitoring through an IYF-developed monitoring and evaluation system.

Table 1. School to Career Program Reach

Academic Year	# of MoEHE Staff Trained	# of StC Students	# of StC Schools
2012–2013	72	2,138	23
2013–2014	106	3,242	31
TOTAL:	178	5,380	54

Methodology

To assess StC's efficacy in supporting secondary students' ability to make informed career decisions, IYF conducted this case study, which includes program successes, lessons learned, and recommendations for the future, including StC's potential sustainability and scalability by the MoEHE. The case study summarizes responses to three primary research questions:

- How effective has the StC program been to date and what steps are needed to enhance its impact?
- What has been StC's impact on strengthening the capacity of the MoEHE to provide career guidance services?
- What are the Ministry's plans to bring StC to scale?

To answer these questions, YED conducted semi-structured interviews with three representatives of the MoEHE administration responsible for overseeing StC, as well as telephone interviews with 77 out of 100 counselors trained by the program. In addition, YED received written responses to an evaluation survey from 2,350 students (46 percent of all participants) to gather data on StC's impact, and conducted four focus groups, with a total of 47 students, at the end of the 2014 academic year.



STUDENTS IDENTIFY CAREER OPTIONS AND LAUNCH CAREER PLANS

The consensus among all stakeholder groups (MoEHE administration, counselors, and students) is that the StC program has a strong impact on students’ ability to make informed decisions when planning their academic and professional futures.

Most StC counselors reported the program was extremely effective in supporting their students and recommended it be expanded to all MoEHE students as part of the educational system starting at an early age. Counselors also found the StC program materials to be effective in helping students to plan for their professional futures, to expand the scope of students’ career choices beyond traditional fields, and to encourage students to gather inputs from a broader range of sources when choosing a career, including both entrepreneurial and vocational professions.

Students also expressed strong appreciation for the program: 86 percent of students surveyed reported overall satisfaction with the program. This positive assessment was confirmed by student focus group respondents, who agreed that the program had expanded their understanding of the career choices available to them.

Students expressed the greatest appreciation for applied learning activities such as the field visits to educational institutions and guest speakers. These activities allowed students to directly interact with specialists and introduced them to fields they were not aware of—

an especially valuable experience given the traditional educational environment prevailing in Palestine. The activity with the lowest reported utility was the StC toolkit (see Table 2). However, the toolkit is designed to be implemented over the course of one full school year, requiring a minimum of twenty sessions that were not allotted to counselors as part of the formal school schedule; hence activities were delivered on more of an ad hoc basis.

Table 2. Student Rating of Activities

School to Career Activity	% of students identifying activity as most useful
Field visits	32
Guest speakers	20
Tamheed	15
Orientation	15
Institutional fair	15
StC toolkit	10
* Total exceeds 100% as some students selected more than one activity	

The School to Career program is appropriate to youth my age. I was thrilled to participate in the field visit activity, which provided me with abundant information on universities and other academic and educational institutes.

– Student from SOS Children’s Village

Building Long-Term Sustainability Through Effective Partnerships

Below are the key partners who collaborated to ensure the quality implementation of the StC program while pursuing its long-term scale and sustainability.

- **Palestine Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE):** The MoEHE, as StC's national counterpart, was involved in all aspects of the program, including design and implementation, facilitating implementation in schools and at the district level, and making refinements as needed.
- **International Youth Foundation/Youth Entrepreneurship Program:** IYF/YED served as strategic technical advisor, convening all stakeholders, coordinating activities among the Ministry and implementing partners, and providing technical assistance in solving problems and identifying areas for improvement.
- **Community Development and Continuing Education Institute:** CDCE-I was responsible for day-to-day implementation, including recruiting and managing technical trainers and consultants as well as coordinating with schools and the MOEHE at the national and district level, as well as with all stakeholders from the private sector and universities. Its work was carried out with support from two YED grants.
- **Technical and Vocational Education and Training League:** The TVET League was responsible for day-to-day implementation of activities, including recruiting and managing technical trainers and consultants as well as coordinating with schools and MOEHE at the national and district level, and with all stakeholders from the private sector and universities.

The project is important as it helps youth plan for their future careers, set realistic goals, introduces them to the labor market, and helps them choose academic or vocational streams.

- MoEHE administrator responsible for overseeing StC

StC AFFECTS STUDENTS' FUTURE PLANS

Eight out of ten StC students had decided their career path by the end of the program; of these, two-thirds said that StC helped them to make this decision. Of those who had made a decision:

- 80 percent planned to go to university
- 7 percent planned to undertake vocational training
- 7 percent planned to join the labor force (e.g., start work, join a family business, or establish a new enterprise)
- 6 percent indicated other plans

In focus groups, the students also reported that the StC program had influenced their career plans, with expanded information about potential careers and how they fit with their personalities and skills, as well as information about what majors are available at various universities throughout the West Bank.

COUNSELORS' CAPACITY STRENGTHENED

YED also surveyed the StC counselors to gather feedback on how the program had impacted their professional development and to gauge the quality of the materials. Overall, the counselors were very pleased with the program, with 91 percent reporting strengthened capacity after the StC training. Counselors also gained a better understanding of the labor market and how to guide students in selecting a career, including considering entrepreneurship as a career choice.

Specifically, counselors felt the training enhanced their skills in the following areas: presentation and communication, planning and time management, and the provision of career guidance and coaching. In addition, counselors appreciated the interactive learning approaches taught as part of the training, which enabled them to give students more space to contribute their own ideas and to be more flexible in dealing with the students.

The interactive learning methodologies from the StC curriculum also changed the way that trained StC counselors work with other students in the schools: nearly 58 percent of counselors had used StC toolkit activities in extracurricular activities for other students in their school outside YED funding.

Lessons Learned

To build on the StC program's success, several areas were identified where support could be expanded to make the program even more effective and facilitate scaling of the initiative. These include:

- Expanding program activities with parents in recognition of their essential role in helping to plan their children's futures
- Working more with classroom teachers to strengthen their capacity to advise students on career guidance decisions
- Extending program offerings to younger students, before they are tracked into particular specializations and become immersed in *Tawjihi* preparation
- Enhancing linkages between school activities and university programs to influence university policies and admission procedures
- Scheduling more StC activities during summer vacation when students have more time
- Training more counselors to expand the program's scope to a greater number of schools and students

STC ENHANCES MINISTRY'S CAPACITY TO PROVIDE QUALITY CAREER GUIDANCE

From the MoEHE's perspective, the StC program achieved key results, including the integration and expansion of career guidance into the educational process; supporting students to make informed career decisions based on their personal strengths; working with parents and families to inform them about the value of career guidance in planning their children's futures; and utilizing experiential learning opportunities like field visits and job shadowing opportunities.

The MoEHE administration felt that the support provided by StC was effective in strengthening its capacity to provide quality career guidance, and that it aligned with the Ministry's goal of strengthening the provision of career guidance for its students. YED's wholehearted support and genuine engagement of all stakeholders enabled



Before my participation in the StC program I wanted to become a carpenter. Now, I know it's better to choose a career suited to my skills and abilities.

- Student from SOS Children's Village

The project was very useful; it gave me the ability to distinguish between my interests, abilities, and choosing the most appropriate career. We were confused before the project.

— Student from the T'qou School for Girls

I gained more information about my future career path. I learned that law is not just about legislation; it includes many other topics, such as human rights. I enjoyed the practical aspect of the job shadowing activity when we visited the court."

- Student from Marah Rabah for Girls



The relationship [between the MoEHE and YED] was positive and raised the performance level of career guidance in schools and among counselors, as well as within the MoEHE in general.

- MoEHE administrator responsible for overseeing StC

them to implement these plans more quickly. The main strength of the program cited by officials was the tailoring of support to meet the Ministry's identified needs and priorities. They felt the training of their counselor staff was flexible and easily adapted to respond to challenges as they arose.

The MoEHE staff identified the training of trainers' process as a major component that strengthened their capacity to provide career guidance, and built sustainability into the program. In the 2014–2015 school year, MoEHE plans to engage 19 qualified trainers to train other counselors at schools not yet targeted by StC. The MoEHE also stated that StC had enlightened the Ministry as to its role in creating linkages between schools and the private and public sectors as well as the labor market in general.

In terms of the Ministry's capacity to bring StC to scale, it has already undertaken steps to establish StC as an allotted class period, rather than as an ad-hoc activity. Ministry representatives expressed plans to sustain the StC program for grades 10 to 12.

IYF recognizes how crucial career education and counseling is to helping youth in secondary schools and colleges—as well as those that are out of school—make more informed decisions about their lives and become more employable. For this reason, IYF is engaging with new funding partners to further enhance the sustainability and scalability of the StC program.

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