

Technical and Vocational Education in the G8, Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA)

Levels of economic growth in BMENA are well below world averages. With the increase of unemployment outstripping growth in GDP, acute unemployment among the young, increasing poverty and underemployment of semi-skilled and skilled workers. There is a need to expand job opportunities to keep pace with rapidly expanding populations and to ensure regional prosperity and stability. The following table shows distribution of the labor force and the unemployed in selected BMENA countries:

Country	Labor force with secondary education or above	Unemployed with secondary education or above
Egypt	42.0	80.0
Bahrain	24.0	59.0
Morocco	16.4	29.6
Jordan	45.1	43.6
Algeria	20.0	37.8
Oman	15.4	39.7
Tunisia	42.6	42.5

World Bank education sector strategy (2007)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) have a role to play in expanding job opportunities. TVET reforms are underway in Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Egypt, in cooperation with partners of the G8 countries and international organizations. But significant challenges remain. TVET systems in the region are not well driven by the labor market needs. The competencies of the labour force do not match with those required by the manpower, productivity and competitiveness needs of the economy.

TVET alone does not create employment, and could be more efficient if it is coordinated well with private sectors. In this recognition, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) should be developed as a key concept for expanding job opportunities and the growth of the economy. With that in mind, more efforts and initiatives should be made both on the policy level and on the system level to better link private sector demands with TVET systems. Most TVET related jobs in some BMENA countries are occupied by expatriates while young nationals remain unemployed. In GCC (write out acronym) countries, expatriates occupy about 90% of this kind of jobs. Strong commitments by the G8 countries and international organizations are needed to increase their individual and collective support and to carry forward these challenges, in addition to the self-help efforts exerted by countries in the region.

TVET can contribute not only to expansion of job opportunities but also to the reduction of poverty through income generation for vulnerable individuals and families. Enhancement of the role of women in the labour market is also one of the priorities as well as sustainable employment opportunities for the youth and rural population. Employment subsidies for disadvantaged youth (school drop outs, youth with disabilities, etc) should also be a priority.

The regional dimension should also be taken into consideration, especially the specific characteristics and the diversity in this region, such as migration of labor forces within the region and nationalization of labor forces in Gulf countries. There are similarities in the systems' causes, problems and issues throughout the region, yet there are many variations and differences. A regional approach can only be productive in the sharing of ideas and experiences but may also be efficient and effective in the areas such as the development of occupational classifications, job qualification standards, assessment and accreditation, and information systems.

It is time for a paradigm shift from the education model (supply) to the market model (supply and demand), and a realization that market-oriented TVET models could be more effective to create job opportunities. In this regard, there is a need to explore efficient mechanisms toward a demand-driven and sustainable TVET system based on Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), while also taking full advantage of the programs and initiatives already have been undertaken.

UNESCO is undertaking a scoping and stocktaking study on initiatives and reform programs in TVET in the region. While this is crucial, studies and reports on the status of TVET in BMENA countries show repeatedly that there is a very poor image of TVET among school students, this is largely due to the absence of career guidance and media strategies in the education systems of most BMENA countries.

Questions:

1. What initiatives are underway to ensure effective PPP at a national level?
2. How effective are current TVET teacher qualifications and practices for enhancing life-long learning (including enterprise-based experiences)?
3. Can we develop a TVET quality assurance model that assists TVET systems and institutions in achieving(?) and assuring better quality programs?
4. How can we establish national training and labor market information systems and link current data bases at national levels to enable possible regional net working in the near future?
5. What is the status of school-level career guidance in BMENA countries?
6. What kinds of linkages have been developed between the basic education sector and TVET opportunities?
7. In which countries are TVET credentials transferable to the higher education system thus allowing graduates with the option to enter gainful employment or pursue higher education opportunities?
8. The US community college model has been a critical in responding to training related to employment needs for the US while also providing a bridging mechanism to higher education. How viable is this model for the BMENA region?

9. How can technical and vocational education centers overcome the stigma that they provide education for lower classes and poor people? How can TVET become more appealing to a larger population?
10. What policies are needed to better resource and finance quality improvements for TVET?
11. Are there any state of the art TVET centers in the region or globally that provide good models?
12. What are the best practices for improving the quality of TVET and how can they be shared in the region?