

Taking On Morocco's Youth Employment Challenge

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BY DR. JOSHUA MUSKIN AND ALEXANDRA BALAFREJ



Youth at the 11 Janvier Middle School in Khenifra, Morocco, participate in an activity designed to promote entrepreneurship.

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Recent reports assert that a “youth employment challenge” poses the greatest risk—and presents the greatest potential—for countries in the Middle East. In Morocco for example, 55 percent of the population is younger than 25 years old, fewer than half enter high school, and only 12 percent enter higher education. In addition, unemployment is at 30 percent for youth. Still, employers complain of a shortage of qualified candidates.

The youth challenge in Morocco, as in most countries, clearly has two sides: how to train, motivate, and mobilize out-of-school youth, and how to ensure that those still in school remain as long as possible and that, when they do leave, they function effectively as economic and civic participants.

MAKING EDUCATION RELEVANT

AED’s ALEF project, which is funded by USAID, reaches more than 255,000 primary and junior high school students in Morocco with a variety of strategies to improve their education and to enrich their academics with a set of concrete skills that helps them to attain their full potential in the workplace.

As part of ALEF’s “relevance program,” these academic and extracurricular models, which combine to give students and their teachers clear purpose in their studies, have produced exciting results.

ALEF includes a program for middle school students that seeks to instill skills and behaviors that will help them be more enterprising. These new skills include: taking initiative, behaving responsibly, solving problems, valuing

teamwork, and acknowledging the importance of perseverance. The students are trained to apply these skills in all of their future academic, professional, civic, and personal activities.

“The entrepreneurship program . . . has given me the opportunity to develop my communication, organizational, and decision-making skills,” says Fatima Zahra Ben Younssi, a student at the Errachid Middle School in Moulay Rachid, on the outskirts of Casablanca. “I have learned to listen to others, to respect them, to work in a team, and to respect my commitments. Our project made me proud, and now I feel confident to conduct any project in my life.”

ENTREPRENEURSHIP PAYS OFF FOR SCHOOL

Students at the Errachid Middle School launched a successful snack bar at their school. Besides meeting a real need by enabling students to find sustenance during the school day, the group used the profits to aid classmates in economic need, helping them to purchase school supplies and other necessary items beyond their families’ means.

“The young people in the ALEF program are on a promising path,” said May Rihani, senior vice president and director of the AED Global Learning Group. “They and their communities see a positive difference in their present lives and recognize the possibilities that their futures hold.”

Dr. Joshua Muskin is the chief of party, and Alexandra Balafrej is the communications specialist for the ALEF project.

Learn more at www.alef.ma

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MAY RIHANI
Senior Vice
President and
Director, AED
Global Learning
Group



To have a productive future, youth need vision, hope, and self-confidence. In addition, a strong foundation in high-quality education is essential to enable them to engage in the critical issues they face every day.

A strong education propels young people into a positive future. The vision, hope, and self-confidence they need starts with equipping them with a set of skills that is relevant and responsive to the demands of the labor force in their country and to the global economy of the 21st century.

I believe youth must have the intellectual freedom to tackle issues that are central to their lives, such as HIV and AIDS, reproductive health, leadership, equity, equality, and poverty alleviation.

Youth also require positive role models to inspire them, motivate them, and make them recognize that they can realize their full potential. Role models expand horizons and chart the way for new generations.



What do you think they need to succeed?

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