



## Youth Assessment of Jordan

### Assessment Geographic Coverage:

13 communities in six governorates: Amman, Aqaba, Tafileh, Irbid, Mafraq, and Zarqa

### Community Selection Criteria

High prevalence of poverty and school drop-outs

### Assessment Youth Cohorts

Over 800 youth in age groups 10-14, 15-18 and 19-24, segregated by age, sex and nationality (Jordanian/Syrian).

### Assessment Adult Cohorts

175 teachers and parents

### Assessment Timeframe:

September-December 2014



Youth assessors determine the types of questions they will use to interview other youth based on their observation of focus groups.

### SUMMARY

Recognizing the centrality of youth to effective and sustainable development, a national youth assessment was conducted to enable the USAID/Jordan Mission to hear the perspectives of youth themselves as they seek to transition into adulthood. The results of the assessment are intended to support the design of programs and approaches that follow USAID's Youth in Development Policy with objectives of strengthening youth programming, participation and partnership in support of Agency development objectives, and mainstreaming youth participation and issues throughout USAID activities.

Following best practices identified in USAID's Youth Policy for youth to have specific roles in assessment and program design, the assessment engaged 13 youth assessors to observe focus groups, validate focus group findings and conclusions, and produce a video in which they presented their perspective on the state of youth development in Jordan. The video can be viewed on USAID's YouTube channel at: [https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHo4IU2okWE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHo4IU2okWE).

The assessment explored three thematic areas: persistence in education, workforce transition, and voice and participation.

The environment in which youth grow up in Jordan is characterized by challenges that include a discouraging education system, violence and discrimination, *wasta* and favoritism, entrenched conservative social and gender norms, a lack of positive role models, an unfavorable job market, and few outlets for exercising meaningful participation in civic life. This hinders the healthy development trajectory for vulnerable youth transitioning into adulthood, resulting in a stalled transition; a prolonged period of idleness and stagnation in which youth perceive diminishing prospects for independence.

In school, teachers are youth's biggest source of frustration. Youth report teachers' high absenteeism, high turnover, and unresponsiveness to youth's requests for support. Youth doubt teachers' competence and emphasize teachers' limited set of disciplinary approaches: physical and emotional abuse.

Young male and female cohorts have high career aspirations. The older they are, however, the less they believe that doing well in school and completing school will allow them to realize their ambitions. For Syrian youth, doing well in school is dependent upon their ability to cope with what they perceive as blatant discrimination and to adapt to the different school curricula in Jordan. Ultimately, most of them believe that succeeding in education is dependent upon their return to Syria and their own curricula. Decisions to remove females from school are generally made by parents who are more preoccupied with family honor which is directly linked to their daughters' reputation.

As youth attempt to enter the workforce, they believe that *wasta* is necessary to secure employment. Fueled by their lack of awareness of alternative job-seeking strategies, youth believe that the right connections determine hiring decisions.



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Female students in Irbid study to get good grades so they will be allowed to remain in school.

For females, social constructs rather than choice determine whether they will work at all and if they do work, in what type of occupation. Their employment potential is tied to particularly restrictive notions of appropriateness and mobility.

The harsh economic realities for both Jordanian and Syrian youth is affecting their perceptions of job market dynamics, sowing seeds of discord and generating tensions between the communities.

Despite youth's ability to recognize issues they would like to change in their community, youth feel a sense of resignation toward their role in making change happen and in taking personal responsibility for addressing communal problems. When spaces for engagement are available, they are generally adult-led or -managed which diminishes youth's involvement and responsibility. The circumscribed ability to voice opinion coupled with a rationed access to civic experience contributes to youth feeling useless and disenfranchised. Against this background of power dynamics and limited individual agency, youth have few if any support networks outside the family.

**In summary**, the nuances of the various social contexts in which youth find themselves — including school, family and community — are stunting their cognitive, social and emotional growth and in turn their successful transition into adulthood. In school, the quality of education available and the perceived lack of competent and emotionally supportive teachers, coupled with regular physical and verbal abuse, affect the youth's ability to acquire knowledge and develop self-esteem and necessary critical and reflective thinking skills.

As they grow older, youth's ambitions are tempered by economic realities and, for females, by an additional layer of restrictive social norms. Prevalent unemployment and low wages push youth to doubt the benefits of staying in school and chips away at their perceived value of education. When youth drop out of school their options are limited by a lack of awareness of alternative educational opportunities.

In the absence of adequate career counseling services, Jordanian youth place the burden of finding work on connections they can access. Their own credentials and educational attainment are seen as secondary in importance. Youth and their parents view vocational training favorably but point to the dearth of available opportunities in their immediate communities. Economic realities are indirectly ameliorating the image of vocational training and tempering expectations, but the academic stream remains youth's first choice in education. While cognizant of restrictive social norms, most females harbor the hope for future employment calling for vocational training opportunities that provide more marketable skills to enter the job market.

Youth have little opportunity to be active in civic life. The lack of change agents in their surroundings feeds this disability.

Despite hardship, this assessment can attest, albeit in small numbers, to resilient examples of young males and females who remain resourceful and adaptive, both individually and collectively, and show strength and willingness to act if provided with guidance.

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