

# The dilemma of meeting the ambitions of a young population and coping with the continuous influence of the regional events: The case of Jordan

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## Abstract:

Jordan is a small country known by its limited natural resources and young population. Jordan's strategic location in a volatile region has negatively affected its social and economic plans. It also contributed to the creation of the two serious development problems; i.e. poverty and unemployment. Children and youth were the mostly affected by these events as they represent high percentage of the population. While developing different active strategies and programs to tackle these problems, the government of Jordan continues to provide children and youth with health and educational services as perquisites for their development and well being.

Moreover, many programs and activities were launched by the government and other institutions for youth aiming at meeting their needs, building their capacities and develop their skills to match the available opportunities in the local labor market. It was not until 2004 when a national strategy for youth was prepared with the participation of 50000 females and males youth in all parts of Jordan. The strategy highlighted the challenges and aims of nine thematic areas from the youth points of view. The strategy is considered a national and comprehensive plan to provide youth with their needs and build their capacities in different fields. However, the real challenge for Jordan is to implement the strategy and solve the youth's unemployment problem and meet their ambitions while coping with the continuous changes in an instable region.

## المخلص

اثر الموقع الاستراتيجي للاردن على النمو السكاني والاجتماعي والاقتصادي حيث عملت الحروب والصراعات في الشرق الاوسط على هجرة العديد من السكان الى الاردن مضيفة ضغطاً على سوق العمل وتغيراً في خطط التنمية الاجتماعية والاقتصادية بما في ذلك التصحيح الاقتصادي حيث ساهمت جميعها على ظهور مشكلتي الفقر والبطالة. لقد اثرت هذه الاوضاع بصورة اكبر على الاطفال والشباب الذين يمثلون النسبة الاكبر من السكان. وقد حرصت الحكومة الاردنية في خططها التنموية المختلفة وبرامجها على الاستمرار في تقديم الخدمات الاساسية، كالصحة والتعليم، للاطفال والشباب لضمان حياة صحية ومستقبل افضل لهم باعتبارهم هدف التنمية وسيلتها في غياب توفر الموارد الطبيعية. لقد عملت التغييرات السياسية المستمرة في المنطقة واستمرار الهجرة والتغيير في الوضع الاقتصادي على تقليل فرص العمل للشباب لاسباب تتعلق بالعمالة الخارجية ومحدودية سوق العمل الاردني. عملت مؤسسات الدولة المختلفة على وضع برامج عديدة للشباب لتطوير قدراتهم لتتلائم مع فرص العمل المتاحة الا انها بقيت مبعثرة حتى عام ٢٠٠٤ حيث تم العمل على وضع استراتيجية للشباب بمشاركة حوالي ٥٠٠٠٠ شاب وشابة من جميع مناطق المملكة عكست التحديات والاهداف من وجهة نظرهم لتسعة مجالات تنموية. تعتبر الاستراتيجية خطة وطنية متكاملة لتاهيل وتطوير قدرات الشباب لتمكينهم من المشاركة في مجالات تنموية مختلفة. لكن الأردن يواجه تحدي في مدى امكانية تطبيق الاستراتيجية وبشكل خاص بتوفير فرص عمل داخلية للشباب في الاردن لحل مشكلة البطالة التي تتواجههم مع استمرار الصراع في الشرق الاوسط وعدم استقرار المنطقة.

## Introduction

The assets of each country play a role in shaping its social and economic structure and development. A country like Jordan, with a young population challenged by its limited natural resource and its strategic location, relies heavily on its human resources as its main objective and mean for development in its development plans and investment. Jordan's strategic location positioned between Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Syria places it at the centre of complex and dynamic political, social and economic forces.

Since its establishment Jordan witnessed and was directly affected by the following political events in the region: The creation of the state of Israel in 1948, Arab-Israeli Wars 48/49, 1967 and 1973, the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, Israeli invasion of Beirut 1982, the Palestinian

Intifadah of 1987, the 1991 Gulf war, the second Palestine Intifadah of 2000, the 2003 US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and recently, 2006, the Israeli war on Lebanon. All these shocks directly affected Jordan's developmental path and processes which led to a deviation from the implementation of its development plans into the implementation of emergency plans. These events negatively affected Jordan in many ways and required the creation of different strategies and plans to tackle the two main emerging development problems - unemployment and poverty. Children and youth are the mostly affected by these events as they represent the majority of the population. Statistics shows that around 61% of Jordan's population is under the age of 25. The government of Jordan throughout these decades was challenged to tackle the social and economic problems that emerged as consequences of the regional conflicts. This required developing different active strategies and programs and at the same time continuing working on developing its plans and programs to meet the needs of its youthful population and achieve its anticipated vision for the country.

This paper is looking at the influence of the regional conflicts and wars on Jordan's demographic, social and economic developments. It also looks at the government's strategies, plans and programs to provide its youthful population with different services to enable them to actively participate in building their future and the country's future. It is also questioning the capability of the strategies and programs in creating job opportunities and stability for youth in Jordan living in a region continually affected by external conflict and shocks.

## Population

Since the sixties Jordan's population has increased eight time. Jordan has a high population growth rate which reached to 4.8% between 1952 and 1979. Jordan's population now is over five millions; 74% of the population is under 35 of age. Population under the age of 20 represents 50% and those in age group 20 to 29 represents 18.6% of the population (table 1).

**Table (1) Estimated population (%) by age group and sex of year 2004**

Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
0-4	11.7	11.4	11.6
5-9	12.7	12.8	12.7
10-14	13.0	12.6	12.8
15-19	13.0	12.4	12.7
20-24	11.6	10.1	10.9
25-29	7.7	7.7	7.7
30-34	6.1	7.0	6.5
35-39	5.2	5.9	5.6
40-44	4.0	4.8	4.4
45-49	3.2	3.7	3.4
50-54	2.6	2.9	2.8
55-59	2.8	2.9	2.8
60-64	2.4	2.2	2.3
+ 65	4.0	3.6	3.8

Source: DOS (1), 2004, p.10

Jordan's population is clustered in urban areas as 82.3% of the population lives in urban areas compared with 17.7% in rural areas. The highest number of population lives in big cities such as Amman, the capital (38.8%), Irbid (17.8%) and Zarqa (14.9%). The population's percentages in the 9 remaining governorates range between 1.4%, as in Tafila, and 6.7% as in Balqa (table 2)<sup>1</sup>.

**Table (2) Estimated population (%) by governorate at end 2004**

<sup>1</sup> DOS (1), 2004, p.6

<b>Governorate</b>	<b>Total</b>
Amman	38.8
Balqa	6.7
Zarqa	14.9
Madaba	2.5
Irbid	17.8
Mafraq	4.7
Jarash	3.0
Ajlun	2.3
Karak	3.9
Tafila	1.4
Maan	1.9
Aqaba	2.1

Source: DOS (1) 2004, p.6

### **Children's and Youth's Status in Jordan**

Children's and Youth's rights are safeguarded by the constitution and reinforced since Jordan ratified Child's Rights Constitution in 1991. All legislations were developed and applied for the interest of children<sup>2</sup>.

Children and youth are provided with the basic services required and needed for their development, safety and well being. Health programs and services are enforced for children starting from the date of their existence, as services are provided to pregnant mothers to ensure children's good health through Mother and Child Clinics with minimum affordable fees. Children's health is also monitored at schools through check ups and they are provided with the needed care. Actions on a large scale were also taken by the Ministry of Health and the government in a number of occasions when serious problems occurred through field studies or check ups, such as providing vitamins tablets and adding iron to flour to overcome malnutrition problem.

As for education, the constitution safeguards the children's right to education. Educational services are provided to all children. Public schools are opened in each village that has 10 children of school age. The Ministry of Education provides its services to 70% of students while the private sector and UNRWA serve 30% of students and are supervised by the Ministry of Education. The net ratio enrollment in Basic Education is high as it reached to 97% (94.1% for females and 93.8% for males). While in secondary education net ratio is 75%<sup>3</sup>.

To match the requirements of the labor market, different educational programs are introduced to youth in secondary education these are: Science, Art, IT and vocational education branches. Higher education is provided by public and private universities and colleges in different parts of Jordan. Vocational training programs are also provided through centers for those who choose to enter the labor market.

To conclude, the government of Jordan focuses on providing children and youth with services that would enable them to engage in the labor market.

### **Economic Scene and development challenges in Jordan**

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<sup>2</sup> Personal status Law Number 82 of 2001, Penal law Number 86 of 2001, the Juvenile Law Number 11 and Number 52 of 2002, the Labour Law Number 51 of 2002, Civil Law Number 9 pf 2001 and Drugs Law of 1988. In addition, there are several laws directed to the protection of disadvantaged children especially those pertaining to child labour, disabled children and orphans

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, 2003

Jordan is a small country by size, has a small economy and lacks natural assets. Jordan is limited in its natural resources; and most of its land is arid and unsuitable for agriculture. The country has suffered with a number of drought seasons and has chronic water shortages. Jordan has a small scale industry. It imports most of the energy it consumes. With such a reality Jordan relies heavily in its investment on its human resources. Accordingly, services and programs are developed and put in place to serve this purpose. Jordan continues to focus on providing health and education services as a priority and prerequisite for the participation of its population in its social and economic development. Different programs were developed to suit the children and youth's needs.

Jordan's economy relied on loans and grants received from different resources. The government benefited from the oil boom in the seventies by receiving many loans which were used in investing in the infrastructure for development. The easy access to grants and loans also contributed, on the long-term, to the external debt. The devaluation of the Jordanian Dinar in 1988 led to negative growth rate which obliged Jordan to turn to International Monetary Fund (IMF) for standby credit. Accordingly, Jordan was required to initiate a process of structural reform aimed at achieving macro-economic stabilization, the re-allocation of fiscal deficits and the creation of an environment conducive to attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This required the adoption of key policies which primarily impacted the poor, such as the removal of subsidies on certain basic goods. The immediate freeze on public sector employment significantly reduced job opportunities in categories of employment where the poorest and least qualified of Jordanian labor force had traditionally been absorbed. The long term process of privatization of state-owned enterprises and utilities also reduced employment opportunities for the poor.

The political events in the region and the global change in the oil prices forced Jordan to start the economic structure program in the nineties which forced 20% of its labor force to unemployment and 17% of its population into poverty cycle. Accordingly, Jordan planned and launched many local programs to solve the two problems. Moreover, Jordan opened its doors for investment, engaged itself in the Global economy, starting restructuring the public services, and provided the legislations and legal infrastructure for investment. However, the poverty and unemployment problems continue to be the focus of the government and are highlighted in different plans and strategies.

## **Unemployment**

Jordan's unemployment problem started in the beginning of seventies with an unemployment rate of 14%. The implementation of three year plan 1973-1975 helped in decreasing the rate by creating thousands of job opportunities locally and in the Gulf States. The Gulf States attracted the professionals, while the government's civil services attracted those who could not benefit from the Gulf opportunities. As a result, the state became the largest single employer.

The impact of the political events in the region added more stress and challenges on the labor market. The changes in the demographic structure increased the number of entries to the labor market with an estimation of 4% (around 45 thousand annually). Other factors added to these challenges are the foreign labor especially from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, the returnees of 300 thousand Jordanians working in the Gulf in 1991, and the privatization of the public sector. All these factors created a real problem for the Jordanian to enter the local labor market. Competition was high for the less skilled laborer who had to compete with experienced candidates returning from Gulf States or with the foreigners from the Arab Counties. For example, Jordanians could not compete with the foreign labor force for the following reasons:

The foreigner accepts wages that are considered to be too low for a Jordanian who cannot live on such wages due to the high living cost in Jordan.

Foreign labors usually come from countries where the value of the currency is lower than that of the Jordanian Dinar, and therefore would make it worthwhile for them to accept low salaries.

Foreign laborers live in groups as singles. They leave their families in their home countries which automatically lower their living cost.

The foreign labor force mainly affected the poor workers as they have to compete with foreign labor for the same type of work. It was reported that their participation in the labor force has decreased to 37% compared with 40% of the poor. The negative effect of the continuation of this problem will lead to an increase in the number of the poor population in Jordan. The families with unemployment problem are mainly affected since 21.5% of the families who live under poverty include an unemployed bread winner compared with 12.8% with a working bread winner.

The higher percentage of unemployment is among youth and females especially the educated ones. It is also higher among youth of poor families compared with youth that lives with wealthy families (42% compared with 36%) The unemployment rate exceeds 50% in 6 governorates out of 12 in Jordan.

The results of the employment and unemployment survey of 2004 showed that rural areas suffer more than urban areas from the unemployment problem. Unemployment rate is reported at 16% in rural areas compared with 11.6% in urban areas and it affects females more than males in both areas. The female unemployment rate is 15.4% in urban areas compared with 21.8% in rural areas. As for the location of the unemployment problem, statistics of 2004 stated that unemployment rates are higher in the southern parts of Jordan. It reached to 22% in Tafila and 21.5% in Karak. The unemployment rates in other governorates were a little better as they ranged between 13.2% in Aqaba, 14% in Madaba, 16% in Irbid and Mafraq. If the population size is taken into consideration (see table 2, provided earlier) the problem is serious in many parts of Jordan. Big cities such as Amman and Zarqa also have to deal with the unemployment problem but not as the other parts of Jordan. It is worth mentioning that areas like Mafraq, Madaba, Irbid and Aqaba have a number of small industries that might contribute to minimizing the size of the problem.

**Table (3): Unemployment rates in different governorates in Jordan**

Governorate	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Amman	9,1	8,7	10,9
Balqa	11,8	11,7	12,0
Zarqa	10,1	9,3	18,1
Madaba	14,6	12,9	24,6
Irbid	16,2	10,3	22,7
Mafraq	16,3	16,0	18,9
Jerash	18,9	17,0	29,1
Ajloun	18,2	17,9	20,4
Karak	21,0	19,7	31,0
Tafila	22,0	20,0	32,4
Maan	16,0	16,0	10,9
Aqaba	13,2	12,0	19,4

Source: DOS (2), 2004

Moreover, the survey reported that the percentage of Jordanian unemployed persons seeking for a job was higher in Amman with 28.3 % (28.0% males and 29.8% females) and Irbid with 23.3% (23.5% for males and 22.5% for females) then in other areas.

The unemployment rates as of 2004 are reported to be 11.8% for males and 16.5% among females. The highest percentages of unemployment were for the age groups 15-19 and 20-24 for both males and females. Unemployment rate for males in the age group 15-19 is 31.9% compared with 23.3% for females and 22.2% for males in the age group 20-24 as compared with 33.2% for females. It is worth mentioning that unemployment rate for females in the age group 25-39 is 13.2% compared with 8.9% for males. Moreover, unemployment rates for the age group 15 to 24 is reported to be 55.8%.

### **Poverty in Jordan**

The political events in the region and the global change in the oil prices forced Jordan to start the economic structure program in the nineties which pushed 17% of its population into the poverty cycle. Accordingly, a number of program initiatives were launched and implemented, but as progress in the changes in the poverty level was slow, the government launched Poverty Alleviation Strategy in 2002. The strategy tried to tackle the poverty problem through the following procedures:

Increase the number of beneficiaries from the Social Aid Fund (NAF)

Increase the job opportunities in the rural areas and small towns through developing the village clusters.

Replace the social safety net program with family income complementary program.

The program started in 2002 with the aim to close the gap between the real income for a family and the poverty line which was defined to be 26 JD monthly for the individual and 156 JD for a family with 6 members compared with 82 JD for the same family prior to the strategy. According to this change the number of beneficiaries has increased in 2002 to 22% and the value of the aid to 43%.

It was reported that the national poverty level for Jordan is 392 JD annually. Jordan's Poverty Assessment Report which is prepared in cooperation with the World Bank stated that the percentage of poverty has decreased from 21.3% in 1997 to 14.2% in 2002/2003.

The percentage of chronic poor people (those who are expected to remain in the poverty cycle and will not be able to leave it) reached to 29% of the poor population. Other portions of the poor population are in transit in their poverty which means that the debt in their income is small and therefore they can enter and leave the poverty cycle according to their income.

The results of above mentioned study showed that poverty percentages varied from one governorate to another. For instance, percentage of poor in Zarqa governorate has increased from 16.3% in 1997 to 22.3% in 2002. It also showed that 13 districts out of 73 were identified to be poverty pockets as the percentage of poor in these districts reached to over 34% of its population and most of them are located in the remote and desert areas. The study also showed that rural areas are poorer than urban areas as 19% of their population are poor compared with 13% in urban areas.

### **The effect of development challenges on Youth**

Poverty and unemployment have a direct effect on children and youth in Jordan. Poverty among children is higher than the population as children under the age of 18 consists of half of the population. Poverty rate among children reaches 16% as poor families usually have higher number of children. Poor families in urban and rural areas have similar strategies to cope with

poverty. One of which is to send their children to work as labors instead of continuing their education. Youth strategies stated that the reason for 31% of the school drop out cases was the economic status of the family compared with 18% for low skills and 11% for the curriculum difficulties. Poverty forced especially male children to labor. The result of the employment and unemployment survey showed that 3% of children between age 10 and 18 years old are in the labor force. However, the estimated percentage of children in the labor force is 5%. They have joined the labor force due to their poverty. The statistics showed that 12% of children do not continue their secondary education as 76% of children who join first grade complete their secondary education. In a study of Child Work Unit at the Ministry of Labor in 2002, it was stated that 60% of working children complete elementary school (now part of Basic education), 34% completed primary education and 13% did not complete their primary education. Working children came from families with low education as 64% of children's fathers complete only their primary education, and 43% of their mothers are illiterate. Results also showed that 25% of working children study and work at the same time.

Moreover, the employment and unemployment survey showed that around 10% of children are in the labor force as part time workers which had greatly affected health, academic performance and their education. The risk is that those might anytime join the labor force as full time workers and drop out of education.

### **Programs for Youth in Jordan**

Many programs for youth were initiated by the government, NGOs, private sectors and international organizations. Aims and objectives varied according to the organization type and location of its services. For instance, Al-Hassan Youth Award is one of the first attempts introduced by His Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal in 1984 to youth between the age of 14 to 25, as self challenging educational programs in services, skills, expeditions and physical recreation aim at achieving a balanced personality development for youth.

The Ministry of Youth provides sport and other leisure activities through its youth centers, clubs and camps. National NGOs such as the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development provide a variety of activities in rural and urban areas in its community development centers such as educational services (English languages lessons for school students), vocational training courses and Youth Clubs. The latter provide youth with different leisure activities (such as camping, swimming, sport activities, training, etc) for a decade and moved in the end of nineties to activities focusing on providing youth with leadership skills and communication skills. Queen Noor Foundation is another national NGO which focuses on providing youth with education, arts, music and other programs.

As a response to the changes in the economic sector and the unemployment problem, the NGOs activities directed in late nineties to provide youth with different skills related to economic participation. Universities also introduced programs in early 2000 to link students with labor market, such as "community service". The program aimed at encouraging students to build relationships with local organizations as an entry step to labor market. The students were forced to contact local organizations and organize an agreement to voluntarily work for them 10 hours as perquisite for their graduation. The experience is reported to the universities by students and by the hosting organizations. The program was beneficial for some students as they marketed themselves as potential candidates to continue working with the hosting organizations after their graduation.

Specific programs to tackle the unemployment problem started in end of nineties and early 2000 by international organizations. They were introduced with names such as Injaz (Achievement) Najah (success), Kafa'ah (competency), etc passing a message of hope, encouragement and determination. Injaz is one of the Save the Children's initiative programs established in 1999. The program aimed at developing youth's personal and professional skills between the ages of

12 and 24. The program focuses on building youth's economic skills and capacities and to orient them towards the changing labor market as well as improving the educational system. The program is implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MoE), UNRWA, Higher Council for Youth, Universities, Vocational Training Institute, NGOs and the private sector. The program has seven courses (Personal life, Planning, leadership, The Company, Entrepreneurship, Success skills and communication skills), implemented in participatory approach which helped youth to develop different skills. The program also provided training for teachers. Since its establishment, Injaz has reached more than 40000 Jordanian students aged 12-24 and has engaged more than 60 private sector enterprises to participate in the project. Building on the success of Injaz, in October 2005 Save the Children launched Najah project to increase the employability of Jordanian youth aged 18-24 as an important step to help teenagers and young adults to determine their own future. The project focuses on capacity building of soft skills and positive attitude for unemployed youth. Other programs such as Youth Leadership (launched in 2005) focused on developing the leadership skills, etc.

On the governmental level, a national training program was initiated and run by the Ministry of Labor (MoL) in cooperation with private sector and Vocational Training Institute. The program came as one of the solutions for the unemployment problem by providing the unemployed youth with training that would enable them to enter the labor market. Training is for free and the participant receives salary for attending the three months training program and is afterward provided with a job opportunity at the private sector.

On information level, Manar website was introduced as another initiative to support job seekers to find the relevant job by using technology. The site was launched by the National Human Resources Development Centre to provide all needed information related to market, legislations, statistics, job opportunities, counseling services, preparing curriculum vitae, etc.

All these initiatives acted separately aiming at filling one of the gaps to solve the unemployment problem and foster youth active participation in different developmental dimensions. There was no comprehensive program or a national program addressing youth's reality, ambitions and needs until 2003 when His Majesty King Abdullah II addressed this issue in his Royal letter to the Government<sup>4</sup> in July and emphasized on the importance of focusing on youth and activating their participation in all development issues in His speech to the Parliament<sup>5</sup> in December of that year:

"The aspiration for change will come about only through stimulating Jordanian youth and listening to their views, for they are the pillars of the future and the substance of change. Consequently, their role should be enhanced, job opportunities should be made available to them and their hopes and aspirations should be realized".

In the two messages, His Majesty highlighted the potential role of youth in building the country's future. He also gave instructions to give priority to youth and consider them active participants by voicing their needs, views, and ambitions and not as recipients of plans, activities and programs. He also highlighted the responsibility of the government to actively involve youth in its development processes.

## **Youth Strategy**

The year 2004 was dedicated to translating the King's vision into a youth strategy that reflects the reality and ambitions of the youth in all over Jordan. The initiative was led by the Higher Council for Youth cooperation with UNICEF.

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<sup>4</sup> His Majesty King Abdullah II Royal Letter of Mandate for the Government, 20 July, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> His Majesty King Abdullah II Throne Speech at the opening of the 14<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2003.

To fulfill the King's instructions regarding stimulating the youth and listening to their views different consultation groups were formed and worked with nearly 50000 Jordanian young people between the age of 12 and 30. They actively participated in defining the contents of the strategy over 18 months and actively included their ideas and opinions. The strategy identified the following nine central thematic areas:

- Youth and participation (politics, economic and social).
- Youth and civil rights
- Youth and leisure entertainment
- Youth and culture and media for youth
- Youth and technology and globalization
- Youth, education and training
- Youth and employment
- Youth and Health
- Youth and Environment

In 2005 the National Strategy for Youth was launched to reflect Jordan's belief in youth's rights in a comprehensive developmental and active participation.

The importance of the participatory approach that the strategy used in developing the strategy reflected the views and opinions of the youth in different areas to help in bridging the gap between the decision making and the reality of the youth and their ambitious. The participation of 50000 males and females all over Jordan reflected the following positive results:

Young females and males participated in developing the strategy so that they live in a stable and protective environment within their families and are provided with good health and educational services.

They consider themselves to have better choices in life than the previous generation. Females consider themselves to have equal opportunities as males in education but their economic choices are limited after their graduation.

The strategy came as a comprehensive plan for youth as it put the youth at the centre of the 9 themes. In each theme youth voiced their views, the problems and the strategic objectives. The strategy also identified activities to be implemented collaboratively with the identified governmental organizations over five years (2005-2009).

The strategy aimed at upgrading the qualifications of youth, improve their knowledge and technical skills to enable them to deal with the upcoming requirements of the century, and to meet its challenges. It also aimed at unifying the efforts of the organizations working with youth by identifying the priorities, developing a working framework, and upgrading the organizations' capacities<sup>6</sup>.

A general observation of the identified problems reflected youth's dissatisfaction with inadequate services, training, actions and education and practical experience they are taught at schools or at universities to meet the demands of the local and global market.

The objectives in the strategy targeted different groups affecting youth's lives and participation. They targeted parents to support their children in choosing a carrier and to support their professional development. Accordingly, activities that would enhance parents to play an active role were included ranging from providing them with necessarily information related to youth, so a better understanding can be developed about them, to training on ways to support youth. The second group targeted in the strategy is youth. The mentioned activities were related to training on different areas to achieve two objectives. One was to provide youth with the

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<sup>6</sup> Higher Council of Youth, 2004.

necessarily knowledge and second to activate their participation. Some of the suggested activities in the strategy included life skills, creative thinking, planning for programs and participating in different development areas and discussions to voice their views. The third group targeted in the strategy is staff working with youth in different organizations. The activities ranged from understanding youth's needs to training on working with them. The majority of the objectives mentioned in the strategy targeted the organizations requiring different actions, such as: modifying the school curriculum, matching education with labor market needs, alleviate unemployment problem, provide counseling services to youth to support them in choosing the path for their future profession and education, coordinate between organization to provide services, develop services, provide opportunities for creativity in Arts, activate national dialogue among youth and with youth and activate youth's participation in different programs with emphasize on voicing their views.

The strategy identified the following governmental organizations to implement its objectives: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Political Development, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Culture, National Training Institute, Ministry of Islamic Affairs, General Administration for Developing the Public Sector, and the Higher Council for Youth.

In 2005 the above organizations implemented 1262 activities that benefited a total of 76888 youth and meet the objectives of that year according to each type of work. For instance, Ministry of Health implemented activities related to nutrition, physical fitness, and preventive actions from diseases, while Ministry of Labor implemented activities related to assessing the youth's needs from vocational training programs, introduced education programs on rights, and training courses on using the computer facilities. Ministry of Social Development focused on its activities on training of basic life skills, problem solving, self esteem, and legal rights. In its activities, the Ministry of Social Development targeted the vulnerable youth especially girls and juvenile. Ministry of Education focused on voluntary work, IT uses for exploring and learning and team work and so on for the other organizations. The implementation of the strategy is monitored by the Higher Council for Youth.

## **Conclusion**

Jordan relies heavily on its human resources and is continually working on meeting the different needs of its youth. The National Youth Strategy is a comprehensive plan that addresses all issues related to youth as requested by them. The objectives of the strategy targeted all stakeholders and covered all topics and issues that provide youth with better environment for participation and empowerment. It equips youth with different skills to enable them to actively build a better future. However, Jordan is challenged with a number of issues to meet the objectives of the strategy:

Implementation time frame for some objectives might be tight especially those related to curriculum modification and development to respond to the labor market requirement. The required modifications in the curriculums, introducing them to the students and assessing the results to ensure achieving their objectives would require more time.

Attracting the private sector in the process of assessing the actual requirements of the labor market and in designing the training programs within the time frame of the strategy.

Jordan faces a real challenge with the capability of the local labor market to absorb the new entries to the market. It has small industries that youth are not attracted to for reasons related to type of work and wages. The big foreign investment in the country is usually the hiring non-Jordanian workers.

Replacement of the expatriate labor in certain types of work with Jordanian labor needs a number of actions. One is related to changing the culture and attitude towards these jobs. Another is related to modification in the wages and working environment. Therefore, more analysis is required for all issues regarding the replacement and for the capability of its implementation, taking into consideration the high living cost in Jordan, the cost in modifying the wages and its feasibility for the employers (the private sector).

Jordan has a small industry and it imports most of what it consumes. Having small industry cannot compete with regional or global industries. The local products would have to compete with the quality, prices and variety of imported regional and global products that would not support the local industry development.

Increasing women's participation in various economic activities.

The continuing conflicts and changes in the Middle East and its influence on Jordan's economic and labor structure will keep challenging Jordan's capability to provide its youth with their needs and job opportunities while coping with the results of these conflicts especially if that required the return of the Jordanian working abroad to Jordan.

## Recommendations

The Arab World especially the Middle East is continually influenced by the political conflicts and its results which are affecting different development plans and programs of each country. Having national strategy that tackles all issues and stakeholders to support youth participation and empowerment is important and essential. However, it cannot stand alone to guarantee a better future for youth. Providing youth in the Arab World with a better future can only be achieved with the unity of the regional efforts and continuing collaboration among the countries. Within such collaboration each country would support the other by investing in its available assets. Such collaboration needs to be freed from the influence of the outcomes of the political results.

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