



EXPLORING THE LINKS

Youth participation and employment opportunities in Jordan



Oxfam partners with the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) through its Youth Participation and Employment (YPE) programme in order to connect with communities and train local community-based organizations (CBOs). JOHUD's aim is to build the job-seeking capacity of youth in four governorates in Jordan. The programme organizes informal activities involving peer-to-peer education to help young people engage in the community as volunteers, and links them to various governmental and non-governmental institutions. COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns have altered the organization's operations, with most projects shifting online. JOHUD has adopted a youth-led initiative aimed at matching young people's skills with labour-market demand in each governorate where the programme operates. This case study presents examples of how the programme has helped young people transform into professionals, and how youth-led employment centres can contribute to youth development activities.

© Oxfam International August 2021

This case study was written by Lamia Raei, an external consultant appointed by the Youth Participation and Employment (YPE) Programme. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of the YPE Programme Management Unit (PMU) and the Programme Team in Jordan in its production. It is part of a series of case studies written to inform public debate on youth participation and employment issues in the MENA region. The YPE programme is part of the Arab Danish Partnership Programme (DAPP) and is funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email Shekhar Anand sha@oxfamibis.dk and Ahmed El Assal a.elassal@oxfam.org.uk.

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. Email policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78748-791-8 in August 2021.

DOI: 10.21201/2021.7981

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

Cover photo: A group of youth during one of the Yalla Alla Tefilla initiative activities to promote eco-tourism in Jordan. Photo: Aisha Shtiwii/Oxfam.

1 INTRODUCTION

Established in 1977, JOHUD works to empower women and youth through its network of 51 Community Development Centres throughout Jordan. It implements its programmes through local youth and women's committees, as well as other services provided by JOHUD's community centres, such as innovation labs, community collective kitchens, knowledge centres, kindergartens and other community support initiatives. These programmes aim to strengthen youth and women's civic empowerment skills and agency in order to promote their active participation and employment within their communities.

JOHUD has nine employment offices across Jordan. These facilitate access to work opportunities for underprivileged communities, with a special focus on women and youth. In total, 3,000 local volunteers serve communities in the 51 community centres. This wide outreach to communities all over Jordan makes JOHUD a strong Oxfam partner. It has provided in-depth training to local community-based organizations (CBOs) on how to best approach youth and build their capacity to seek jobs as part of its core role in Oxfam's Youth Participation and Employment (YPE) programme in Jordan. The training has also addressed how to develop CBOs' fundraising capacity, as well as how to change traditional community mindsets regarding men's and women's work and their economic engagement. The goal is to increase their employability and ultimately improve the economic situation of vulnerable communities.

As part of Oxfam's YPE programme, JOHUD began by reaching out to CBOs targeting youth in four governorates (Karak, Tafleeh, Balqa' and Madaba), conducting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis before the training to assess local CBOs' capacity so that the training would be more effective. JOHUD's approach involved engaging youth in discussing topics related to economic initiatives and supporting youth-led initiatives that can increase their employability chances.

The partnership between Oxfam and JOHUD adopted a two-pronged approach: the first was to focus on debating issues of relevance to youth, and the second was to organize informal activities involving peer-to-peer education to help young people engage in the community as volunteers. Once youth became engaged in their community initiatives, the programme provided them with the support needed to access, through networking and dialogue, various governmental and non-governmental institutions, increasing their ability to create their own networks on a local level. Equipping youth with soft and civic skills enables them to realize their labour rights and build their communication and networking skills, which are essential to engaging effectively in the labour market and seeking job opportunities through job fairs or other job-matching forums.

The programme planned to consolidate these efforts in 2020 by addressing impediments to youth employment and entrepreneurship, through mapping existing job opportunities and building youth capacity to join the labour

market. However, COVID-19 and the extended lockdowns have altered the organization's operations, with the majority of JOHUD's projects shifting online. Debates, surveys and awareness-raising sessions have been conducted remotely.

During these challenging times, Oxfam and JOHUD have focused on building youth preparedness to join the labour market. Young women and men have been trained in how to present their volunteer experience in a covering letter and a CV and mentored in interview skills. The programme adopted a youth-led initiative that aims to match youth skills with labour-market demand. It resulted in the creation of two Youth Development Offices, in Karak and Madaba, to attract a pool of potential employers for young people. The initiative received a positive response from employers, but its implementation was slowed down due to COVID-19.

Jordan's short-term growth prospects have substantially weakened due to the pandemic. Economic growth was projected to contract significantly – to -3.5% of GDP in 2020¹ – and informal employment amounts to about 40% of the labour market.² Jordan suffers from a very high economic dependence ratio, with each worker supporting 3.7 other people in 2016.³ Those socio-economic trends make families particularly vulnerable to the loss of jobs and income. According to the Government of Jordan, in the last quarter of 2020, one of the highest ever unemployment rates was recorded for youth: 47.9% for people aged 20–24 years old.⁴

2 FROM COMMUNITY ACTIVIST TO PROFESSIONAL

Osama Ajouri, a 23-year-old man from Balqa', started attending JOHUD activities in early 2020. He became involved in organizing youth debates and initiatives in Balqa' Governorate prior to the COVID-19 lockdown. 'During the first two months, we initiated a campaign to encourage home gardening', he explains. 'We also organized debates and discussion panels with local officials, such as the mayor, municipality officials and at the Ministry for Social Development, to discuss challenges around the agricultural sector and youth employment in our community.'

Oxfam and JOHUD decided to continue providing training for the youth they support during the lockdown period, including through online courses on how to write a professional CV and covering letter. 'I finished high school, but I had no idea or training on how to present my skills professionally', Osama explained. 'My involvement in organizing debates taught me how to work in a team and how to define each member's role, to serve the objective of holding a debate addressing both decision makers and the public.'

During his enrolment in the YPE programme, Osama learned about an opportunity to join UNHCR as a volunteer. 'I prepared my CV and a cover letter, as per the JOHUD training, and followed their instructions on how to

conduct myself during a professional interview. Consequently, I was recruited as an assistant rapporteur with UNHCR. My tasks include supporting local community committees, distributing in-kind assistance to Syrian refugees and supporting youth employability. I have started to support youth in their efforts to find jobs, by using the JOHUD model of training youth on how to present their professional skills in a CV, write a covering letter, and how to perform at interview. The JOHUD training has positively affected my self-esteem and increased my engagement in social and community issues.'

Osama's current job requires writing activity reports, documenting activities and supporting teams in implementing aid programmes. 'All of this I learned during the JOHUD training', he says. 'Thanks to the project, my current managers often describe my work as flawless.'

Osama has now landed an annual contract with UNHCR. 'I am working hard to continue my career with UNHCR, by constantly improving my knowledge and skills in the field of humanitarian aid. [The] YPE project enabled me and my peers to benefit our communities, improve our self-esteem and to actively engage in volunteering activities.'

3 YOUTH-LED EMPLOYMENT CENTRES

Sham Maaytah, a 20-year-old woman from Karak, was introduced to JOHUD's project activities while studying at university. She was actively engaged in JOHUD's activities in Karak, attending debates and joining various initiatives. One of JOHUD's managers told her about Oxfam's YPE programme and encouraged her to enrol in the training. She attended all the project activities and learned how to write an appealing CV and covering letter, organize youth initiatives and transfer peer knowledge. Sham then took this knowledge and went further.

'As a youth group, we decided to start an initiative to establish Youth Development Offices in Madaba and Karak', she says. 'The initiative aims to map available jobs in these governorates and to match them with existing youth skills and competencies, or to train youth so they qualify for the available vacancy. We started contacting private institutions and non-profits, and they had great confidence in the abilities of youth engaged in the programme.'

Although COVID-19 slowed the process down, Sham and her peers remain committed to making the initiative successful. 'When I finished my training, I learned that the International Medical Corps was recruiting volunteers to work as child and youth trainers. I decided to approach them based on the JOHUD training and was selected for the job – which I could not have achieved without the YPE programme training.'

Oxfam and JOHUD are keen to demonstrate how youth participation and civic engagement can lead to better employment opportunities. Oxfam is supporting JOHUD to develop its monitoring and evaluation system to find out whether further engagement with youth increases their employability. The Youth Development Offices created by young people themselves could operate as a 'linkage entity' not only in the two governorates of Madaba and Karak, but in all four governorates targeted by YPE activities. The success of the Youth Development Offices run by young people indicates how civic engagement and participation can improve youth employability. As part of the programme, Oxfam and JOHUD aim to support these offices and to monitor their progress in improving young people's livelihoods.

NOTES

1 World Bank. (2020). *Jordan's Economic Update – April 2020*.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/publication/economic-update-april-2020>

2 Ibid.

3 R. Assaad and C. Krafft (2020, September 14). *Covid-19 aggravates Jordan's acute youth employment challenges*. <https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2020/09/14/covid-19-aggravates-jordans-acute-youth-employment-challenges/>. Economic Research Forum.

4 Department of Statistics, Government of Jordan. (2021, March 9). Press release.
http://dos.gov.jo/dos_home_e/main/archive/Unemp/2020/Emp_Q4_2020.pdf



OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 21 organizations, working with its partners and allies, reaching out to millions of people around the world. Together, we tackle inequalities to end poverty and injustice, now and in the long term – for an equal future. Please write to any of the agencies for further information or visit www.oxfam.org