

**INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW
VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 1 • FALL 2013**

The Connection between Improving Unemployment and Rebuilding Security in the Middle Eastern and North African Regions

Meredith Canniff Fortier

Meredith Canniff Fortier is a Master's candidate in the International Policy & Practice program at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. She holds a J.D. from Albany Law School and served as Adjunct Assistant Professor of Business Law at LaGuardia Community College. She focuses her graduate research on education and security.

Abstract

One of the most critical security challenges facing the Middle East–North Africa region is unemployment. The World Bank reports that the region will require over 50 million jobs within the next ten years, particularly in light of its booming youth demographic. However, the region's failure to equip graduates with skills that are marketable within the global economy reveals a disconnect between the variables of government will, private sector engagement, and quality of education. While this underdevelopment is reflected across the region, Morocco provides a case example of a nation with a struggling system, but also a willingness to innovate in order to allow students to receive practical educational opportunities.

Introduction

At a rate of 25 percent, youth unemployment is one of the most critical security issues facing the Middle East–North Africa region.¹ While statistics vary, according to both the League of Arab States and the UN Development Programme, the region will need to create approximately 50 million jobs in the next ten years in order to meet the needs of its booming youth population.² In 2012, the World Economic Forum reported that

youth represent 30 percent of the population of the MENA region, with 100 million individuals between the ages of 15 and 29.³ This paper examines the following questions: what are the connections between improving security and unemployment in the region; how do the variables of government support, quality of education and private sector involvement support these linkages; and what are the policy implications? In particular, this paper focuses on the experience of one nation, Morocco, to highlight examples and gain perspective from the ground. The nation reveals a portrait of high youth unemployment and a struggling educational system, but also exhibits a willingness to innovate in order to allow students to receive practical educational opportunities more likely to lead to jobs. These same innovations could have important applications across the MENA region.

Security and Unemployment: A Critical Connection

There is an intrinsic connection between improving unemployment and the security of a state. A citizen's failure to support themselves and their family causes social and economic fractures in local communities and nations alike. Focusing on improving youth employment prospects in developing countries is a critical security tool that has tremendous potential to peacefully advance both domestic and international security. This is particularly applicable to the MENA region, where the effects of high unemployment on security have been twofold. First, a lack of employment opportunities for young people significantly contributed to the beginning of the Arab Spring following the self-immolation of Tunisian vegetable vendor Mohammed Bouazizi.⁴ His act embodied the frustration of MENA youth underserved by their countries, sparking a region-wide movement to challenge the institutions stymieing advancement.⁵ Second, unemployment in the region has contributed to extremist movements, particularly in nations like Yemen.⁶ The failure to establish sound institutions with effective governance has left its youth population with little chance to pursue its own social mobility or financial advancement.⁷ As such, some youth have been more inclined to support extremist groups that appear to offer help in contrast to governments that offer them little in the way of economic or social advancement.

For example, terrorist or extremist groups may recruit young people to act as a driver or messenger.⁸ The limited choices available to young people make this quite attractive, as they search for ways to support themselves and their families.⁹ Moreover, social pressures in the region further compound the unemployment problem, notably for young men.

While early marriage continues to be the norm in a few poorer countries and in rural areas, the regional trend is toward an often involuntary delay of marriage. This is particularly true for young men in the Middle East, who are delaying marriage for longer periods than their counterparts in other developing regions. In a region where marriage and family are fundamental rights of passage to adulthood, the involuntary delay of marriage is a form of exclusion and is generating new social and economic difficulties by protracting the transitions of young people.¹⁰

The stigma attached to unemployment has strong ramifications for young men and the notion of being excluded from networks of friends or family may lead individuals to contemplate joining criminal or extremist groups to not only provide for themselves monetarily, but also to feel as if they have accepted a defined role in a larger community.

Variables: The Roles of Government Support, Education Quality and the Private Sector

Government Support

Government support plays a key role in propelling the region's youth towards self-sustaining jobs. While this paper focuses on Morocco, it is notable that other MENA states are also supporting initiatives to improve unemployment. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Jordan have all engaged in educational initiatives to ready graduates for the modern workforce to varying degrees, and with very different results. Qatar has drastically reformed its education system by establishing an "Education City," where Qatari students may attend branch campuses of some of the world's most prestigious universities, including Georgetown University and Carnegie Mellon. Qatar has also reshaped its primary and secondary school systems

to better prepare students for university entrance. The Qatari government instituted these reforms based upon the premise that it wanted to develop a knowledge economy and a highly skilled labor force. The government hopes that developing this workforce will reduce dependence on foreign workers.¹¹ The nation has a tremendous amount of capital and a much smaller population than many nations in the MENA region. However, its reforms could be somewhat instructive for neighboring countries.

Conversely, Saudi Arabia provides a more muted example of reform, largely tempered by resistance from more conservative political and religious elements within its government. The Saudi government centered its reform on improving its youth unemployment rate. While unemployment statistics are not well publicized by the Saudi government, some estimates place youth unemployment (ages 20-29) at approximately 27 percent as of 2012.¹² Education Minister Prince Faisal bin Abdullah has been leading efforts to reform and modernize education to meet employment demands under a program called *Tatweer*, a \$2.4 billion dollar education project.¹³ While the Prince has been pushing for reform, he has faced resistance from conservative clerics closely tied to the government who fear that educational advancement will lead to a secular society and the corruption of women.¹⁴

Jordan has engaged in minor education reforms including a World Bank project that focused on the development of skills for a knowledge-based economy.¹⁵ With a youth unemployment rate of approximately 30 percent, the government has primarily focused on austerity measures that place unemployed youth at further risk for poverty.¹⁶ The inaction is a reflection of the belief that giving young people opportunities to learn a specialized skill set may threaten the existence of the monarchy in power. Faysal Itani of the Rafiki Hariri Center for the Middle East noted of Jordan, “the monarchy’s real dilemma is that the path to development lies in renegotiating the very foundations of the state, and challenging the sense of entitlement among groups that have historically provided the greatest support to the palace.”¹⁷ This type of reform seems highly unlikely in the near future as it requires the Jordanian monarchy to compromise its political power. However, improving access to education means expanded

employment opportunities for young people in addition to more economic growth and decreased political unrest.

While the Qatari model is the most aspirational among MENA nations, the Saudi Arabian case reflects many of the same tensions of reform in countries like Morocco and Egypt. Lastly, Jordan represents a kind of “last-case scenario” in education reform, as the government has done little to garner more opportunities for its young people. Reforms to education and policies to stave off youth unemployment hinge upon whether or not they threaten the political and cultural systems in place, particularly in countries like Saudi Arabia and Jordan.¹⁸ What remains to be seen is how far governments will go to support educational reform to increase employment, as the social mobility it promotes may not be in keeping with current governance structures.

Education Quality

The failure to prepare graduates to obtain employment has dramatic effects on the prosperity of graduates and their families and, in turn, security throughout the region. It is striking to note that a 2012 survey by Booz & Co. revealed that “50 percent of middle-class respondents think that the region’s education system does not provide opportunities for them or their children, in terms of increasing the likelihood of finding jobs.”¹⁹ The survey reflects little confidence in educational systems accessible to youth among the middle class. Undertrained teachers and inequality of access to higher education institutions have also contributed to this underdevelopment.²⁰ The region is not only behind in terms of academic performance, but also in the creation of academic research.²¹ Moreover, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization reports that individuals in the MENA region are enthusiastic about online educational technologies, but the region has lagged behind in bringing them to the classroom, as there are concerns about their application.²² Many of the materials generated for these online technologies are not in Arabic. Students do not necessarily have the resources available to them to learn either French or English, and the transition to either of these languages proves difficult at best. For example, with regards to Arabic-

speaking students studying English, a recent study showed that “considerable differences in the two languages, in terms of alphabetic characters, grammar, syntax, and the overall linguistic logistics of the two languages,” make learning English that much more difficult.²³ Lastly, primary and secondary systems focus on rote memorization; shifting the classroom focus to critical thinking and analysis would better prepare MENA graduates to compete among their peers in the global workforce.²⁴

In spite of these deficiencies, there have been significant improvements. Distance learning programs are slowly being established across the region, although their presence is still a fairly new phenomenon. Open learning centers have been added in both Egypt and Syria. Cisco and AMIDEAST also launched a training center for entrepreneurs in 2012 in Morocco. The center will teach business courses both online and in the classroom. The courses are skills focused and give business owners an opportunity to improve their business expertise.²⁵ Additionally, Blackboard, an online educational programming company, established programs at King Saud University, King Faisal University and the American University at Sharjah in 2011.²⁶ While these are isolated examples, these establishments will help to drive trends in online learning throughout the region, as educational institutions compete with one another. Ultimately, these initiatives will provide students with more choices and more access to educational opportunities.

Finally, governments and institutions are beginning to collaborate to work on broader regional strategies for educational improvement. For example, the Middle East Institute for Higher Education and the Social Affairs Sector of the League of Arab States signed a Memorandum of Understanding in order to build a strategy to advance educational development across the region. The two organizations are also aiming to find areas where cooperation is possible between them, with goals to improve teacher performance as well as the quality of education.²⁷ These regional agreements are an important first step as they allow countries to exchange ideas, explore commonalities, and begin to develop a more comprehensive strategy that could be applied across the region.

Private Sector

Private sector involvement is also a critical component to improving unemployment and increasing security. No nation in the MENA region, with available data, has a private sector employing over 20 percent of its citizens.²⁸ However, the region is experiencing significant economic growth, with GDP increasing by 4.4 percent in 2010 and 4.9 percent in 2011.²⁹ These statistics underscore the inefficiencies in the use of labor across the region;³⁰ they are the by-product of a mismatch between the skills being taught and the skills actually needed within the region's domestic economies.³¹ For example, in Tunisia, 50 percent of those students trained in social science fields were unable to find work after graduation, but 80 percent of medical school graduates were able to secure employment within a similar timeframe.³² To this end, experts at the Middle East and North Africa Economic Forum recently opined that US \$4.3 trillion would be needed to improve training and employment prospects.³³ In particular, promoting job creation in small to medium-size enterprises (SMEs) also plays a unique role in the MENA region in that they are linked to local resources and serve local entities.³⁴ As the economy continues to grow, it is important to link these businesses to training and employment opportunities for young people as a part of the process rather than just simply an afterthought. More specifically, SMEs could provide valuable input to educational institutions in terms of the types of skills required by the market, as well as curriculum development. A nation's small enterprises are often the foundations of its smaller communities and can act as stabilizing institutions for areas in political turmoil. The presence and success of these businesses and larger private corporations bear a crucial connection to security in MENA nations themselves and throughout the region. Both entities also provide jobs to support growing families and give youth opportunities to contribute and connect to their communities in meaningful ways, which leads to stronger security throughout the region.

Case Study: Morocco

Morocco can in no way be considered representative of the entire MENA region, an extraordinarily fragmented and complex group of countries. However, the nation has been selected as a case study for several reasons. First, one-tenth of the MENA region's youth population is located in Morocco.³⁵ This sizable fraction indicates that the employment of Moroccan youth plays a key role in the economic success and sustainability of the MENA region. As noted at the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Middle East Institute for Higher Education and the League of Arab States, "any improvement achieved in any Arab country has a rippling effect in the region."³⁶ Second, outside of the 2011 constitutional reforms in Morocco, the nation's political system has remained relatively stable, unlike the rapidly shifting political profiles in the rest of the MENA region. This stability has given the government significant opportunities to invest heavily in programs that better serve its students and to begin to produce measurable results. Third, the Moroccan government has engaged in several innovative programs, described below, to accelerate job growth. To combat barriers to employment, the Moroccan government has created 50 new training centers throughout the country, as well as 70 job search agencies, to prepare students to meet the market upon graduation.³⁷ Moreover, Morocco has engaged the private sector, particularly in the fields of aeronautics and renewable energy, to bring more jobs to students who have graduated from the vocational programs. These initiatives will prepare graduates to enter the job market with marketable skills that the economy needs for growth.

Addressing Unemployment in Morocco

Morocco faces significant challenges to reducing unemployment. Lack of access to higher education, gender disparity,³⁸ and school dropout rates have hindered economic prosperity and the growth of households nationwide. While enrollment numbers at universities rose an average rate of 3.2 percent between the years of 1999-2000 and 2006-2007, providing access to higher education and vocational training remains a key challenge

in Morocco.³⁹ Higher education enrollment for those ages 19-23 remains at 12 percent, compared to 45 percent in Jordan.⁴⁰ These percentages are significant in that Morocco, like several other MENA nations, is experiencing a “youth bulge.” Approximately 28 percent of Morocco’s population is between the ages of 15 and 29.⁴¹ In 2012, the World Bank estimated that 30 percent of this youth demographic was unemployed.⁴² Furthermore, World Bank research indicates that approximately 80 percent of the unemployed youth population “have less than secondary education (or no education at all); less than 5 percent have tertiary education.”⁴³ In 2012, the overall unemployment rate in Morocco was 8.1 percent, which is a decrease from the previous year’s rate of 8.7 percent. Despite this overall decrease, it is clear that youth unemployment remains an overarching concern for both the Moroccan population and its economy.

Barriers to Student Success

There are several obstacles within Morocco’s education system that make it difficult for students to succeed as both students and graduates. First, the Moroccan education system is exam-based and only permits those students with the highest exam scores to enter a public university, and even then, there are limited spaces available in university programs based upon government quotas. Both young men and women, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, have had considerable difficulty entering degree programs because of the structure of the Moroccan system and the barriers around it.

Second, similar to other nations throughout the MENA region, another significant impediment has been the nation’s systemic failure to align education with the demands of the private sector. In spite of steady economic growth during the past decade (Moroccan GDP grew by approximately 3.3 percent in 2010), there has not been enough progress to advance the amount of job opportunities available to young people.⁴⁴ Foreign investors are drawn to Morocco because of the availability of labor and burgeoning industries including renewable energy, telecommunications, and tourism.⁴⁵ Investor interest will only get stronger

as Morocco prepares to enter a free trade agreement with the European Union.⁴⁶ Even though the demand for labor is growing with the economy, there is inadequate training to prepare young people for careers in these fields. *Entraide Nationale*, Morocco's National Assistance Agency, provides vocational training for youth in various sectors, such as social work, but comprehensive programs aimed at these burgeoning industries are lacking. This has manifested itself in a variety of ways. First, the young people looking for jobs, particularly those lacking a university education, have not had a wide range of opportunities to gain training in these fields from either the government or the private sector. Second, there is little private sector involvement to boost vocational programming, and the creation of certifications that students can obtain upon the completion of the training.⁴⁷ These barriers result in lost opportunities for Moroccan youth, particularly given the growth of multiple sectors. Moroccan youth will continue to lose out unless more substantive training is provided by the government or private sector.

Lastly, similar to other areas of the region, language has remained a barrier to education and employment. Most universities in Morocco teach predominantly in French, while primary and secondary school instruction is conducted mostly in Arabic.⁴⁸ As university courses are only taught in French, the opportunity to obtain a higher education is reserved for only those students who have had access to French courses, thus excluding the majority of university age citizens. One unemployed young man in the Tanger-Tetuan region noted,

You will never see a boy or girl from a poor family speaking French. After independence, the government made the decision to replace French with modern Arabic, and look at the results: the rich speak French because they attend private schools or *La Mission* (French school); the others speak no French and even no Arabic. We are the victims of this policy. It is easy to understand who will be unemployed in this country.⁴⁹

The result of this exclusionary system is that most secondary students will complete their secondary education, but have extremely limited options upon graduation. These limited options mean higher unemployment across Morocco. In addition to the university system, most private sector jobs

require French skills, which is clearly problematic when an Arabic-speaking graduate begins to search for a job.⁵⁰ For example, information technology firms have hired Moroccans to work in call centers, accounting for approximately 50,000 jobs, but again, sound French skills are required to obtain a position.⁵¹ While many young people may have a working knowledge of French, it may not be enough for them to be able to conduct business in a professional setting. Moving forward, these language skills should be recognized as an important component of any vocational or university program.

Government and Private Sector Solutions

Combatting these obstacles to student achievement and graduate success is formidable. However, both the Moroccan government and private sector have taken important steps towards providing training to students, which better prepares them to meet the market upon graduation. The Moroccan policy of curbing unemployment through improved education has been implemented through several strategies that the Moroccan government has undertaken. Private sector engagement has also been a key component to the government's policy. This dual sided policy has begun to set Morocco ahead in the region in terms of decreasing its unemployment and increasing security. Since 2011, the nation has been relatively stable and continues to develop its private sector.

First, Morocco's Office for Vocational Training and Work Promotion (OFPPT) estimated that 310,000 trainees would be admitted to its 2012-2013 vocational programs, an enrollment increase of 438 percent when compared with its 2002-2003 program.⁵² It is a marked improvement from previous decades when vocational programs were highly selective and only a limited number of traineeships were available.⁵³ To underscore the importance of this type of training, the Moroccan government introduced the Education Emergency Program in 2009; its core focus was to build upon the educational programming the Moroccan government had instituted over the past decade.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Morocco has worked to develop training programs in consultation with the private sector via international and domestic public-private partnerships. This has enabled students to enter a program with a substantial probability that they would obtain employment after degree completion. For example, Morocco's expanding aeronautics industry has prompted the opening of the Moroccan Aerospace Institute to provide training to vocational students. The institute was established through a partnership between the Moroccan government and industry experts.⁵⁵ Boeing, Safran, and Bombardier have all invested in new factories throughout Morocco. The training is geared specifically towards the manufacturing and engineering specifications of the industry.

Consequently, employment in the aeronautics industry has grown from approximately 4,000 workers in 2004 to almost 10,000 in 2012.⁵⁶ The average wage for an aeronautical worker is approximately 15 percent above Morocco's monthly national average.⁵⁷ The country has also begun to develop its renewable energy industry, yet another sector requiring skilled labor. "Morocco has the most ambitious renewable energy programme in the MENA region. It expects 42 per cent (equivalent to about 6,000MW) of its total energy mix to come from solar, wind and hydroelectric sources by 2020. It has more planned wind and solar projects than anywhere else in the region."⁵⁸ The Moroccan government estimates that clean energy will bring 50,000 jobs to Morocco by 2020.⁵⁹ With the emergence of this new field, training programs will need to be designed to fit the skills of the sector. It presents an opportunity for Morocco to find commonalities with other regional players in renewable energy like Algeria, Tunisia, and Jordan and perhaps collaborate to develop training strategies for workers entering the sector.

To support these efforts, the Moroccan government has augmented partnerships between these major corporations and Moroccan educational institutions to make learning more accessible to all. A fitting example is a 2008 program formed between the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education and Alcatel-Lucent, where the company agreed to make their information platforms available in Moroccan educational institutions.⁶⁰ The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has

also invested heavily in the nation with a recent \$131.5 million dollar program aimed at several development programs within Morocco, including education.

In addition, in July 2012, USAID partnered with Higher Education for Development (HED) as part of the broader Middle East and North Africa-U.S. Community College Initiative. As part of this Moroccan program, Ecole Normale Supérieure de l'Enseignement Technique de Rabat was partnered with Middlesex Community College and Bristol Community College to develop curriculum in entrepreneurial education, and design flexible degree programs around the entrepreneurial skill set.⁶¹ This type of program spoke to the interface needed between international institutions that have expertise in the development of vocational programs and colleges and institutions in Morocco looking for more effective curriculum.

Morocco has undertaken significant efforts to bolster the opportunities available to youth and prepare them with skills that enable them to meet the job market with sound job prospects upon graduation. Moreover, these programs are critical to providing skilled workers within the Moroccan and MENA economies for two reasons. First, a larger supply of skilled labor means a more prosperous national economy as the private sectors in industries such as aeronautics, textiles, and renewable energy demand more skilled labor. Second, these innovations represent opportunities for young Moroccans to support themselves and their families, while making important contributions to Moroccan society.

Beyond the “Arab Spring”

Several regional experts had expressed hope that the Arab Spring would prompt sweeping changes in educational systems across the region. At the 2011 World Innovation Summit, Tarik Yousek, a former Arab Studies professor at Georgetown University had even commented “The Arab Spring is possibly the best thing that could have happened for educational reform in the Arab World.”⁶² Certainly, the movement reinvigorated the debates about the quality of education in the region, as well as the opportunities provided to students after graduation. After all, the start of

this transforming moment was due, in part, to high unemployment across the region, and was a reflection of the frustration of young people being unable to support themselves and their families. Many in the region had hoped that the Arab Spring would spur changes to education systems and prompt more cohesion between the educational and business sectors. However, as these movements have dissipated across the region, the political conditions, particularly in countries like Egypt, have not permitted the type of advancement necessary to reduce unemployment. In spite of the trends towards collaboration with private sector industry, along with partnerships with institutions like the World Bank and USAID, broader regional progress remains hindered by a lack of political will. MENA nations have ample opportunity to improve economic and political stability by implementing policy frameworks similar to those, which have been undertaken in Morocco, but require the political will and stability in order to implement similar frameworks.

Moving Forward

Based upon the current political and economic conditions of the MENA region and the strong connection between unemployment and regional insecurity, a comprehensive strategy to promote job growth is critical. Improving employment conditions in the region means increased economic growth, a growing middle-class, and a more prosperous future for the region. By integrating the variables of government intervention, educational improvement, and private sector involvement, regional leaders will have the best chance to improve employment conditions for youth.

Private Sector Engagement

To engage the business sector, regional lawmakers must establish more liberal trade and business regulations, which makes sectors like aeronautics and renewable energy more willing to enter MENA markets.⁶³ There is a symbiotic relationship between support for job creation and private sector development. Failing to engage the private sector means that there will not be enough jobs to meet demand for the 50 million positions needed within the next 10 years.⁶⁴ Lowering barriers to market entry in

combination with a willingness to help train potential employees make these nations more attractive to multinational companies seeking new places to do business, particularly in light of heavily globalized processes. Properly engaging the private sector also requires new regulations that encourage growth. Reshaping the current regulatory environment will require political will and compromise, as well as input and cooperation from the private sector.

Current regulatory frameworks for labor should also be scrutinized.⁶⁵ As they stand now, many labor regulations only protect an elite few and act as an entry barrier to the job market for both women and others.⁶⁶ Relaxing the regulations means that more individuals can work, which will then spur further economic growth as a result of increased spending. Moreover, focusing on regional resources is crucial. For example, the MENA region has both the climate and low humidity levels to be a leading producer of solar energy, and government policies favoring sector development can be a big part of private sector engagement.

Education Reform

Second, government educational reform should emphasize vocational training tailored to private sector needs. Exploring the synergies between the skill sets at vocational schools and the skill sets taught at universities would be another way to efficiently use existing educational resources. This would also require significant education reform. Most MENA systems phase students into tracks early on in their secondary academic careers. As such, this type of crossover would require points of entry for vocational students in university tracks. This could take the form of some type of transferable credit system for vocational students. A similar model has been established at Qatar Community College, which allows students to pursue a four-year degree upon program completion. These types of vocational models may also be helpful to those who may have lost their jobs during the fiscal crash, and may be facing exclusion from their family or friends without a job. Educational reform should also include the development of analytical and critical thinking skills at the primary and secondary level, so students are equipped to better compete within the

global marketplace, instead of rote memorization. A renewed emphasis on foreign language learning, particularly English, French and Spanish would also enable students to gain more access to private sector positions. Additionally, reforms should include funding for more online learning technologies like Blackboard and other software to give students more access to a wider array of programs to choose from. These technologies will also enhance student learning in the classroom. Another key item requiring both funding and reform is academic research. Research is a large component to reform as it can drive private sector innovation, thus forging an important connection with the private sector community, particularly in the areas of science and technology. Lastly, lifting barriers to access for minorities and women in the MENA is an integral part to build a sense of inclusion into educational systems. Any education reform should include a discussion of how to provide more educational access to minorities, as well as an assessment of those conditions that keep them from obtaining an education.

Political Will

Third, and most importantly, the approach of regional governments must be underpinned by financial backing and political will from the governments themselves to ensure sound implementation. Like Morocco, other MENA nations stand to benefit immensely by investing heavily in education. Employed individuals are less likely to leave their home country to seek employment abroad, and less likely to engage in any criminal activity. As governments around the region have collapsed due to the political turmoil of the Arab Spring or due to the fiscal crisis, one of the side effects has been an increase in extremism, particularly in countries like Yemen, with little or no governance in place. As noted, this violence is sometimes attributable to high unemployment. When there are few opportunities to find a job, individuals can be compelled to take low-level positions with extremist or violent groups, and become a part of criminal network, even though their intention may have been only to support themselves.⁶⁷ The increased social mobility that employment brings counters strong political and cultural undertones in the region. What stands out most in the Moroccan case is that the government saw the Arab

Spring begin to take hold in 2011 and instituted constitutional reforms to assuage its constituents. More importantly, the Moroccan government utilized that moment to revitalize their efforts to reform education and engage the private sector. As a result, the Moroccan monarchy has stayed in power relatively peacefully. Backing efforts to stop unemployment can derail political instability and attempts to disrupt governments in power, but it requires these same governments to reshape the way that they think about power, as well as reshape the governance structures in place.

Political will is not only about acting as a singular nation to improve unemployment, but collaborating with regional neighbors and international partners to contemplate approaches for success. At an International Labor Organization meeting in May 2013, Ambassador Mohamed Khaled Khiari, the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the UN, echoed this sentiment, “All of us are aware that there is great deal of hard work, pragmatic and political will needed to change course.” He went on to comment that, “We need to make employment the focus of our efforts at the national, regional and international levels.”⁶⁸ This call for collaboration lends itself to considering the innovations and practices in Morocco during this turbulent period. This is particularly true in light of the fact that Morocco shares some of the same economic challenges and has gone through some of the same types of changes as these other nations experiencing political upheaval from the Arab Spring, particularly in terms of unemployment and the discontent of the youth population. It takes political will on the part of a nation to decide to ask for collaboration and support, as it is a politically sensitive question itself.

Conclusion

A Moroccan case study cannot possibly paint a full portrait of each nation in the MENA region, which all have distinct cultural, political and linguistic characteristics. However, the nation’s example provides ample terrain to support the idea that the innovative strategies it is employing to train graduates have practical applications across the region. These strategies become particularly important in the wake of the Arab Spring. While the endgame is uncertain, ample preparation for a politically and

economically robust region is critical. Regardless of the political landscapes of the MENA region, the fact remains that there will be approximately 50 million citizens in need of jobs in the MENA region within the next 10 to 15 years.⁶⁹ The consequences of systemic inaction and failure could increase the likelihood that a movement more severe in degree than the Arab Spring could develop, causing further unrest, economic malaise, and instability. Strengthening the connection between these variables through sound policy implementation will enable this region to sustain both its economies and its people. Systems that adequately serve the public will allow the youth of this region will be able to support themselves and their families, while bolstering sustainability and security within the region.

Endnotes

¹ Masood Ahmed, Dominique Guillaume and Davide Furceri, "Youth Employment in the MENA Region: Determinants and Challenges," in *Addressing the 100 Million Youth Challenge-Perspectives on Youth Employment in the Arab World in 2012* (World Economic Forum, June 2012), 8, <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Youth_Employment_ArabWorld_Report_2012.pdf>

² Ibid., 25.

³ Ibid., 2

⁴ Rania Abouzeid, "Bouazizi: The Man Who Set Himself and Tunisia on Fire," *Time Magazine*, January 21, 2011, 2, <<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2044723,00.html>>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rebecca Winthrop and Kevin Watkins. "Campaign 2012: What Focusing on Drones and Detention Misses," Brookings Institution, April 20, 2012, 2, <<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/4/20%20terrorism%20winthrop%20watkins/20%20terrorism%20winthrop%20watkins>>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Navtej Dhillon, Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, Paul Dyer, Tarik Yousef, Amina Fahmy, and Mary Kraetsch, "Missed by the Boom, Hurt by the Bust: Making Markets Work for Young People in the Middle East," The Middle East Youth Initiative, Dubai School of Government & The Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings, May 2009, 12, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2009/5/middle%20east%20youth%20dhillon/05_middle_east_youth_dhillon_final.pdf>

¹¹ Alisa Rubin, "Higher Education Reform in the Arab World: The Model of Qatar," Middle Eastern Institute, July 31, 2012, <<http://www.mei.edu/content/higher-education-reform-arab-world-model-qatar>>

¹² Donna Abu-Nasr, "Saudis Skip Arab Spring as Nation Pours Money into Jobs," April 2, 2012, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-02/saudis-skip-arab-spring-as-nation-pours-money-into-jobs.html>>

¹³ Allam Abeer, "Saudi education reforms face resistance," *Financial Times*, April 25, 2011, <www.ft.com/cms/s/0/07607fb0-6f5d-11e0-952c-00144feabdc0.html>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Haif Bannayan, Juliana Guaqueta, Osama Obeidat, Harry Anthony Patrinos, and Emilio Porta, "The Jordan Education Initiative: A Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Model to Support Education Reform," World Bank, June 2012, 2, <<http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/1813-9450-6079>>

¹⁶ Que Newbill, "Jordan's Forgotten Youth Problem," *The ISN Blog*, April 3, 2013, <<http://isnblog.ethz.ch/uncategorized/jordans-forgotten-youth-problem>>

¹⁷ Faysal Itani, "Jordan's Dilemma," Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, Atlantic Council, April 12, 2013, <<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/jordan-s-dilemma>>

¹⁸ Abu-Nasr, "Saudis Skip Arab Spring," 3.

¹⁹ Richard Shediak, Bohsali Samer, and Hatem Samman, "The Bedrock of Society, Understanding and Growing the MENA Region's Middle Class." Ideation Center, Booz & Company, 2012, 16

²⁰ David W. Chapman and Suzanne L. Miric, "Education Quality in the Middle East," *International Review of Education* 55 (2009): 311-44 at 313.

²¹ Jonathan Gornall, "Middle Eastern research has a new portal to the world." *The National*, June 17, 2011, <<http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/middle-eastern-research-has-a-new-portal-to-the-world>>

²² World Bank, *Free to Prosper: Jobs in the Middle East and North Africa-Overview* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012), xiii.

²³ Ibrahim Bani Abdo and Gerald-Mark Breen, "Teaching EFL to Jordanian Students: New Strategies for Enhancing English Acquisition in a Distinct Middle Eastern Student Population," *Creative Education* 1, no. 1 (June 2010): 39-50, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2010.11007>. See p. 40.

²⁴ Karim M. Sabbagh, Chadi N. Moujaes, Leila Hoteit, Jussi Hiltunen, and Hatem Samman, "Education for Employment – Committing Enterprises to Education Development in the Middle East and North Africa," in *Addressing the 100 Million Youth Challenge-Perspectives on Youth Employment in the Arab World in 2012* (World Economic Forum, June 2012), 26, <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Youth_Employment_ArabWorld_Report_2012.pdf>

²⁵ "Morocco : Cisco and AMIDEAST Launch Cisco Entrepreneur Institute Training Center in Morocco," MENA Report (wire service), May 12, 2012.

-
- ²⁶ “Blackboard Expands Presence in Middle East to Meet Growing Demand for Online Learning,” *Business Wire*, August 15, 2011.
- ²⁷ “Middle East Institute for Higher Education Partners with the League of Arab States.” Targeted News Service, June 7, 2011. <<http://www.aucegypt.edu/news/Pages/NewsRelease.aspx?rid=228>>
- ²⁸ World Bank, “Free to Prosper,” 1.
- ²⁹ International Labour Office. *Global Employment Trends 2012: Preventing a deeper jobs crisis* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2012), 71. <http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_171571.pdf>
- ³⁰ World Bank, *Free to Prosper*, xiii.
- ³¹ Sabbagh et al., 26.
- ³² World Bank, “Free to Prosper,” 25.
- ³³ Saifur Rahman, “Middle East needs \$4.3 trillion in infrastructure,” *Gulf News* (Dubai), February 5, 2013, <<http://gulfnews.com/business/economy/middle-east-needs-4-3-trillion-investment-1.1141669>>
- ³⁴ Dhillon et al., “Missed by the Boom,” 26.
- ³⁵ “The Challenge of Youth Inclusion in Morocco,” World Bank, May 14, 2012, <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/05/14/challenge-of-youth-inclusion-in-morocco>>
- ³⁶ Medhat Haroun, Provost of American University in Cairo, as quoted in “Middle East Institute for Higher Education Partners with the League of Arab States.”
- ³⁷ British Council, “National Vocational Education Training Strategy,” accessed February 5, 2013, <<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-skills-for-employability-moroccan-country-national-vet-strategy.htm>>
- ³⁸ World Bank, “Maintaining Momentum on Education Reform in Morocco,” September 11, 2013, <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/09/11/maintaining-momentum-on-education-reform-in-morocco>>
- ³⁹ Mohammed Bougroum and Aomar Ibourk, “Access and Equity in Financing Higher Education: The case of Morocco,” *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 41, no. 1 (March 2011): 115-34, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11125-011-9184-8>>. See p. 118.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Edward Sayre and Samantha Constant, “The Whole World Is Watching,” *National Journal*, February 21, 2011, <<http://www.nationaljournal.com/magazine/why-the-middle-east-s-youth-bulge-is-key-to-the-region-s-stability-20110221>>
- ⁴² Agence France-Presse, “World Bank says Morocco’s youth unemployment ‘very serious,’” *Al Arabiya News* (Dubai), September 7, 2012, <<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/09/07/236710.html>>
- ⁴³ Gloria LeCava, Tara Vishwanath, Matteo Morgandi, Umar Serajuddin, Maros Ivanic, and Irene Jilson, “Promoting Youth Opportunities and Participation in Morocco,” World

Bank, MENA Knowledge and Learning Quick Note no. 66 (June 2012), 1.

<<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/QN66.pdf>>

⁴⁴ Gloria LeCava, Tara Vishwanath, Matteo Morgandi, Umar Serajuddin, Maros Ivanic, and Irene Jilson, "Promoting Youth Opportunities and Participation in Morocco," World Bank, full report, June 2012, 2. <<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/11909/687310REVISED00029020120Box369250B.pdf?sequence=1>>

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁶ European Commission, "The EU's free trade agreements – where are we?" MEMO/13/576, June 18, 2013, <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-576_en.htm>

⁴⁷ LeCava et al., "Promoting Youth Opportunities," full report, xii.

⁴⁸ Aida Alami, "Gaps in Graduates' Skills Confound Morocco," *New York Times*, September 29, 2013, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/30/world/africa/gaps-in-graduates-skills-confound-morocco.html>>

⁴⁹ LeCava et al., "Promoting Youth Opportunities," full report, 39.

⁵⁰ "Challenge of Youth Inclusion."

⁵¹ Alami, "Gaps in Graduates' Skills."

⁵² Hassan Benmehdi, "Morocco Focuses on Youth Vocational Training," *Magharebia.com*, August 15, 2012, <http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/08/15/feature-04>

⁵³ Bougroum and Ibourk, "Access and Equity," 118.

⁵⁴ "The World Bank Supports the Implementation of Morocco's 'Education Emergency Program 2009-2012,'" World Bank press release no. 2010/464/MNA, June 8, 2010, <<http://go.worldbank.org/OIMQSUXHT0>>

⁵⁵ Daniel Michaels, "Morocco's Aviation Industry Takes Off," *Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 2012, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204059804577226763868263758.html>>

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Norton Rose Fullbright, "Renewable Energy in Morocco," May 2012, <<http://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/knowledge/publications/66419/renewable-energy-in-morocco>>

⁵⁹ Siham Ali, "Renewable energy to boost Morocco jobs," *Magharebia.com*, June 8, 2010, <http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2011/06/08/feature-07>

⁶⁰ "Alcatel-Lucent and The Ministry of Higher Education Training and Scientific Research of the Kingdom of Morocco through their partnership make collaboration platforms available to Moroccan universities," Alcatel-Lucent press release, November 24, 2008, <<http://www.alcatel-lucent.com/press/2008/001352>>

⁶¹ "Linkages for Entrepreneurship Achievement Project," Higher Education for Development, <<http://www.hedprogram.org/ourwork/partnerships/MOR-2012-01-01.cfm>>

⁶² David Matthews, “Arab Spring shines a harsh light on outdated systems,” *Times Higher Education*, November 10, 2011, <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/arab-spring-shines-a-harsh-light-on-outdated-systems/418093.article>>

⁶³ Office of the Chief Economist for the Middle East and North Africa Region of the World Bank, *Enabling Employment Miracles: Middle East and North Africa Region: A Regional Economic Update* (Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank, April 2012), 29, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NEWSARABIC/Resources/EDP_Spring_2012_MENA.pdf>

⁶⁴ Anthony O’Sullivan, Marie-Estelle Rey, and Jorge Galvez Mendez, “Opportunities and Challenges in the MENA Region,” in *Arab World Competitiveness Report 2011-2012* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2012), 43, <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_AWC_Report_2011-12.pdf>

⁶⁵ World Bank, *Free to Prosper*, xiv.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Winthrop and Watkins, “What Focusing on Drones and Detention Misses,” 2.

⁶⁸ “Time to act on the youth employment crisis,” International Labour Organization, May 31, 2013, <http://www.ilo.org/newyork/news/WCMS_214588/lang--en/index.htm>

⁶⁹ O’Sullivan et al., 43