

## Emerging Stronger After the Downturn: The Imperative of Regional Cooperation

Given the scale of the economic crisis and the commonalities of long-term challenges facing young people across the Middle East, progress hinges upon greater cooperation between countries. The best solutions can be found within the region: the variety of experiences in the region provides localized ideas—a source of strength that is largely untapped in the quest for improving the welfare of the young generation.

In recent years, several countries, including Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, have launched youth-oriented, multi-sector strategies that seek to align reforms across education, employment, and other related areas. We have also seen the rise of several regionally-oriented funds and organizations that are focusing on promoting better outcomes for young people, such as the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation (Dubai, UAE) and Silatech (Qatar).<sup>33</sup> However, capitalizing on these efforts requires overcoming the divide between the processes of *policy development, knowledge creation, and investment in youth programs*. Across borders, governments, the private sector and civil society organizations operate largely in isolation from each other. At the regional level, there is insufficient learning on the effectiveness of policies and a

lack of timely information on youth conditions and those innovations apt for scaling up.

Exploiting the benefits of regional cooperation means building stronger linkages between these three domains—*policy, knowledge, and investment*. By bolstering and pooling efforts in research and knowledge, countries can generate best practices and evidence on what works and what does not in the area of youth policy and programs. By forging greater cooperation on policy development, policy makers can create a process for exchange that will provide support in their pursuit for long-term reforms. Investments in policies and programs can have a better return and prove more effective when informed by evidence based knowledge and lessons from across the region (See Box 9).

The inclusion of young people is the most critical 21st century economic development challenge facing the Middle East. Solving this challenge has long been critical to the prosperity and stability of the Middle East. Now in a downturn, it is set to become more complex and urgent. The time is now for forging greater regional cooperation to build more effective policies, knowledge and investments toward a better future for the young generation.

### BOX 9: BENEFITS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

- Maximize the benefits of ongoing economic and social reform through sustained and collective action on youth development.
- Generate knowledge and good practices to support policy makers in weathering the global economic slowdown, as well as fostering positive long-term impact.
- Develop new instruments for aligning policy and program action.
- Create public-private partnerships to scale up innovations in youth service provision across borders.
- Enhance country capacities for developing and implementing policies and programs.