

Third Party Opinion of the Second Human Resources Development Sector Investment Loan, Jordan

By

Osama Obeidat, Ph.D.

The project is highly relevant to the developmental plans of the government of Jordan that strive to improve education sector, giving opportunities to all and improving the quality of education. This project overlaps with the comprehensive education reform in Jordan that started in 2003 under the name of Education Reform for Knowledge Economy (ERfKE), which will end in June 2009, and another phase of the reform will be launched for five years. The first phase of ERfKE consisted of four major components: (1) Re-orienting education policy objectives and strategies and reforming governance and administrative systems; (2) Transforming education programs and practices to achieve the learning outcomes relevant to the knowledge economy; (3) Supporting the provision of quality physical learning environments; and (4) Promoting learning readiness through expanded early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002).

The project under evaluation has helped in reducing the enormous demand on schools which create pressure on the government to provide more building. This pressure is obvious and reflected in the number of dual shift schools and rented buildings. Moreover, the demand has increased as a result of enrolling tens of thousands of Iraqi children in public schools after they fled to Jordan as a result of the 2003 war.

Under ERfKE the government is working with the World Bank and other donor agencies to build new schools, expand the ones which already exist, and provide more furniture. This is going to continue under ERfKE II. Therefore, it can be concluded that the project is highly relevant to the needs of the Kingdom.

The project can be described as efficient because it was implemented as originally planned. However, it is less efficient because it was initially planned to be implemented from 1997-2002 but the actual period was from 1997-2005. Thus the actual implementation period largely exceeded the planned period. It is not clear why it took 68% more time to implement the program. This could be due to overlooking the local conditions in the planning process, or due to other factors that are not clear at this stage. No explanations were mentioned to justify this delay. Another factor related to efficiency is the cost of the project. The actual cost of the project was 15% less than the planned amount. This indicates that the project was very well managed and monitored. It is very exceptional to see a project which meets its objectives and reaches the targets with less money in developing countries like Jordan. Usually it takes more money to achieve the pre-set objectives. Credit should be given to the management of this project.

Another issue to be raised here is how much the equipment in the comprehensive schools is really utilized? After all, equipping and furnishing schools does not necessarily mean they are used.

The effectiveness of the program in terms of support for the vocational secondary component of the comprehensive schools was limited in terms of the filling rate, graduation rate, and unemployment rate. I am afraid that this will continue to happen because the government does not adopt a very clear policy that should be

parallel to expanding the physical infrastructure. At the end of the day, if this is going to continue then the schools built under this loan to encourage vocational education will be empty as it is the case in some rural areas. Graduation rate of students on vocational secondary education is still low due to the fact that those who enroll in this track are the low achievers who can not have opportunities to enroll in the academic stream.

The employment rate after graduation depends on the students' major and the region. Those located in urban areas have better opportunities compared with those in rural areas. The lack of employment opportunities will discourage others to enroll in vocational training especially in rural areas and less industrialized ones. However, the Ministry of Education with the support of the European Union put a plan that began in 2008 to improve the qualifications of trainers in the vocational schools, better equip these schools so that graduates will be better trained and have better opportunities to enter the labor market.