AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

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Industry Advisory Groups:

INSIGHTS FROM THE ASWAN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Aga Khan Foundation, Egypt and Om Habibeh Foundation

December 2018

Overview

Employment-seeking young women and men in Egypt face numerous obstacles, including mismatched skills and inadequate preparation for and information about labour market demands. They lack access to affordable training to develop marketable skills, employer contacts, and entrepreneurship training that are directly linked to market requirements. Few opportunities exist for workplace-based mentorship and coaching, making it hard for new entrants in many technical occupations. To prepare young women and men for the workforce, it is imperative that training institutions develop programs that are high quality, market-driven, gender-sensitive, and responsive to emerging trends and opportunities.

To address a number of these challenges, Aga Khan Foundation and Om Habibeh Foundation in Egypt undertook the formation and engagement of Industry Advisory Groups in their implementation of the Aswan Skills Development Program (ASDP), an initiative to improve the livelihoods of young women and men in Aswan and Kom Ombo districts in Upper Egypt.

This technical note outlines the strategic objectives and the Industry Advisory Group model adopted for the Aswan Skills Development Program—and presents the lessons and best practices drawn from that experience.

Context: the Aswan Skills Development Program

The Aswan Skills Development Program (ASDP) is a five-year, $12.5 million program funded by the Government of Canada, through Global Affairs Canada, and Aga Khan Foundation Canada. Implemented by Aga Khan Foundation, Egypt with its local partner, the Om Habibeh Foundation, ASDP focuses on supporting job creation opportunities for local communities in Aswan and Kom Ombo districts in Upper Egypt through increasing youth employment and employability prospects, as well as self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities through business development, entrepreneurship, and vocational training.

The program also aims to support the local employment eco-system and facilitate improved collaboration among local labour market stakeholders, including public and private training institutions, as well as employers. ASDP supports the creation of an improved enabling environment for youth employment — specifically including employment of young women — by building capacities, facilitating strategic partnerships, and linking key labour market stakeholders in Aswan Governorate.

The program reflects priorities articulated in Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, including Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls; Growth that Works for Everyone; and Inclusive Governance. It also builds on the longstanding partnership between Canada and the Aga Khan Development Network to alleviate poverty and promote equitable and inclusive development globally.

Industry Advisory Groups: Background and Objectives

Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs) are committees of industry representatives, including employers, who advise training institutions on the development of employability skills training and technical and vocational educational and training (TVET) programs. Training institutions facilitate IAG meetings to support the development of relevant, timely, and effective workplace preparation programs. These groups advise on training curricula to ensure programs are responsive to local labour market trends and industry requirements. IAGs ensure that training programs are market-driven and adhere to quality standards, including gender-responsive measures, established in collaboration with industry stakeholders. In sum, Industry Advisory Groups help ensure that programs delivered by training institutions incorporate the input of key stakeholders in the labour market.

IAGs can also help training institutions develop timely, relevant programs that prepare youth for current opportunities and address key knowledge or skills gaps in a particular sector. Companies that take part in IAGs can give the training institution valuable information that builds upon what is already known from labour market studies, including how many trainees each company expects to recruit, and the types and levels of skills sought.

Industry Advisory Groups have played strategic role in ASDP. For the program, the key objectives in working with IAGs were:

1. To identify and define industry skills requirements
2. To advise training institutions in the development of training materials and curricula
3. To create partnerships with industry representatives that can further contribute to program objectives, such as the provision of internship opportunities for female and male students

ASDP implementing partners Aga Khan Foundation, Egypt and Om Habibeh Foundation also saw IAGs as an important tool to engage industry representatives as advocates for improved training and skills development opportunities for youth. The groups can serve as an effective forum to raise awareness of youth employment challenges among wider industry stakeholders.

ASDP's Industry Advisory Group Approach

The ASDP approach to IAGs draws upon a model from Seneca College (Toronto, Canada), OHF's Canadian Technical Partner under the project—adapted to meet specific program needs and relevant industries within the local operating context. Both the Aga Khan Foundation and Global Affairs Canada supported the adaptation of this Canadian model as it focuses on market-driven, outome-based learning and adheres to established quality standards leading to skilled graduates who are ready for the job market. It integrates elements that contribute to students' professional and personal transformation, enabling them to succceeed in their chosen careers.

The ASDP approach to establishing and facilitating IAGs is outlined below; it can be modified to meet the needs of other training institutions and the contexts in which they operate.

1. Define objectives and select industries
In collaboration with one of the training institutions supported under the program, the ASDP implementing partners first defined the objectives for the IAGs and selected the industries whose consultation and participation would benefit the training institution. At this stage, the partners have found it valuable to consult labour market studies to identify sectors in which there are gaps and opportunities for women's and men's employment. This may include government-run organizations (e.g. health care, education), civil society, and the private sector (industrial companies, banks, hotels, etc.). Staff may decide to hold stakeholder forums to gain additional insights to aid in the selection of priority industries. Following initial consultations, staff may decide to revise or refine this list of industries as sector needs become clearer.

2. Develop terms of reference (TOR)
Once the training institution has developed a clear, specific, and agreed-upon list of objectives for the IAGs, the next step is to develop a terms of reference. This should include the purpose and rationale for establishing the IAGs, principles of the IAGs, and roles and responsibilities for members. See Appendix 1 for an example of the TOR used by ASDP. The TOR will guide the recruitment process for IAG members. However, it can and should be reviewed with the members at the first meeting, and revised if necessary.

3. Select partners
The training institution's staff then generates a list of companies within the identified target industries that vary in size and scope and are representative of the geographic area of interest. The training institution also invite industrial expertise from outside the geographic area of interest if they can offer relevant insight to enrich the meeting discussions or ensure that women's perspectives are included. A managerial staff member from the training institution then contacts the relevant management staff in these companies and arranges individual meetings to describe the approach of IAGs and outline the role of IAG members. It is preferred that these meetings are held in person but they may be conducted over the telephone if necessary.

Under ASDP, emphasis was placed on ensuring that women are selected and participate in the IAGs. Each company also receives an emailed description of the training institution and the TOR so the principal decision makers can understand the purpose of IAGs – and the benefits of participation for the company. Following these discussions, the training institution manager issues formal invitations for companies to send one or two representatives (depending on company size) to attend an IAG startup meeting. It is often useful for the training institution to share the course outline along with the agenda and TOR with IAG members ahead of time so they can reflect and generate ideas before attending the first meeting.

4. Form IAGs

The training institution may convene multiple IAGs, each with 4-5 members, for industry-specific discussions on labour market needs, skill requirements, and training curricula. IAG meetings enable training institution staff to collect valuable information for program development.

The selection of IAG members should be purposeful and deliberate. Each member selected should be able to bring diverse perspectives, and relevant insight and expertise to the table.

Each IAG as a whole should be representative of the sector to the greatest extent possible. It is also important that IAGs include both women and men. Engagement of women in particular is important for developing an understanding of specific challenges they may face in the sector. IAG members requiring support to participate, including transport, child care, or holding discussions during convenient times and in accessible locations, should be facilitated in each industry.

ASDP held additional forums with labour market stakeholders prior to forming IAGs. These fora convened up to 25 representatives from different companies to inform participants of the industry advisory process, discuss overall labour market trends, and collect general feedback on draft curricula. If the fora are held near the beginning of the program development process, they can be used to identify key sectors for training interventions. Stakeholder engagement forums can act as 'trial runs' for a training institution to get to know potential IAG members, allowing the training institution to identify those who will be active participants. A certificate of attendance may also be provided to the IAG members who participate.

5. Convene IAG meetings

The first IAG meeting is important for setting the stage for the entire industry advisory process. At this stage, the group should review the TOR and agree on any necessary amendments. During the first meeting, a senior manager from the training institution should share the following:

- The training institution's vision
- Background on the training institution's current activities and course offerings
- The required roles and responsibilities of IAG participants
- How each IAG member and their company can benefit from participating in the IAG. These benefits include the opportunity to participate in a network of like-minded professionals with a common goal, learn from guest speakers, share challenges and solutions with similar business leaders, and influence the development of competency-based and market-driven training programs.

All IAG members should leave the first meeting with a common understanding of the group and its purpose.

After these initial discussions, the remaining time in each IAG meeting is used for the staff of the training institution to share draft curricula and request feedback. Each IAG is given a course outline specific to their industry, and participants use pre-structured feedback forms to document their ideas. The training institution may also administer a survey to IAG members to collect specific data needed. Based on ASDP's experience, some examples of the key questions that are asked at this stage include:

- Based on your experience and knowledge of the industry, which methodology would you recommend to better prepare prospective employees to work in this field? Why?
- Is the career path we are supporting needed in the market? Are any career paths missing?
- What should be the expected outcomes of each course? What skills does your company require from the candidates you recruit?
- What would be the appropriate timeline for a course? Does each course framework offer enough time to deliver the necessary curriculum?
- Is the training sufficient for students to get a job in the industry?
- Would you hire a recent graduate from this course?
- Of your current employees, are there any qualities or skills that are lacking?
- What are the unique challenges or barriers that women face in this industry – such as more limited employment prospects, gender inequality in the workplace, or a lack of women in leadership positions – and how could this training address them?
- Has the curricum been reviewed from a gender perspective?
- What are the measures that can be taken in the training to ensure that young women meet industry needs?

The training institution incorporates feedback from the IAG meeting into the course design and develops a revised outline of the course. Depending on the organizational structure of the training institution, this process may be conducted through curriculum committees or by a curriculum development expert. The training institution then shares a final draft of the course outline with the IAG in a subsequent curriculum review meeting for additional feedback before launching the course.

The development of a full course curriculum is its own process that goes beyond the scope of this document and will vary depending on the training institution. This may be done using internal human resources or by consulting with an external technical partner, or both.

In addition, it is essential that the curriculum committee ensure that the curricula being developed is gender-sensitive by applying a gender curriculum revisions checklist that includes the following:

- Spoken and written language uses either gender-neutral or both male and female forms
- Male and female-connoted domains appear equally often and with the same importance
- Women and men are presented as engaged in non-stereotypically female or male trades
- Women and men appear in course materials (photos, examples) to the same extent
- Women and men are presented in the materials at the same hierarchical levels.

6. Hold ongoing review and follow-up meetings
In the initial stages of course development, IAGs meet as many times as is needed to discuss which modules are suitable, customize the materials as necessary, produce a high-quality course outline, and launch the course. Based on ASDP experience, this could mean up to three meetings in a single quarter.

Once the course has been launched, the training institution convenes the IAG once every six months for follow up. The purpose of follow-up meetings is to:

1. Update course materials, based on
   a. Feedback from previous iterations of the course
   b. Recent trends in the industry, including developments in technology
   c. Feedback from alumni of the program based on their experience or performance in the market.
2. Discuss internship opportunities that IAG partners could provide, including specific placements for female interns in non-traditional trades. This should also include a discussion on how partners could create an enabling environment for female interns, such as through mentorship opportunities.
3. Discuss cross-cutting issues in the labour market that are not recognized and readily addressed by employers (e.g., gender equality, youth engagement, environmental sustainability) and work on enhancing employers' knowledge and capacity with regard to these issues.

At times, it is more appropriate to frame these meetings as workshops, as the intention is not only to discuss issues and updates, but also to facilitate collaboration to improve curricula and strengthen partner capacity. This may include hosting an industry expert as a guest speaker.

In particular, the ASDP experience has found IAGs to be an effective venue for providing discussions and training for employers on gender equality, workplace anti-harassment policies, and strategies for promoting women's internships and employment in non-traditional trades. IAGs can encourage employers to become advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment in their companies and institutions.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

The following are some key lessons learned based on ASDP experience with IAGs:

1. It is important to strike a balance between industry perspectives and the program team's pedagogical and curriculum development expertise.
IAGs are a point of reference for the training institution to gain a better understanding of what is needed in the market – enabling them to tailor trainings to fit these needs. IAGs are not created for industry representatives to design the curriculum entirely. Instead, the program's own technical expertise regarding gender-responsive adult learning methodologies, international benchmarks, best practices in training pedagogy, and program evaluation should be considered in conjunction with the perspectives of industry representatives to ensure trainings are of high quality, market-relevant, and gender-sensitive.

2. Creating additional stakeholder forums outside of IAGs may be useful for building relationships and common understanding with labour market stakeholders.
As mentioned above, ASDP held additional forums, in the form of industry advisory workshops, to aid in building a network of industry representatives that could potentially participate in IAGs. These workshops ensured that industry representatives and the ASDP team had a common understanding of roles and responsibilities of those involved. The workshops also acted as a space for the ASDP team to discuss some of the benefits of participation with industry representatives.

3. The initial IAG meeting should include a discussion on how companies can benefit from participation in the IAGs.

It is important to identify the mutual benefits for the training institution and IAG participants. This includes emphasizing how IAG participation can enhance a company's reputation, especially in the case of a program that aims to support youth employment. Under ASDP, the faciliators underscored to participants that the program is creating a high quality product (i.e. training courses) that directly fits their company's needs for new employees—and that graduates will be the among the best in their fields. Participation in an IAG may also lead to easier recruitment of new graduates.

Programs may also consider inviting representatives to a thank you gala, to act as guest speakers at events, or provide opportunities for media exposure. These types of activities and messages remind IAG participants they are active contributors to the process of developing market-relevant trainings, and not just passive advisors who have been consulted by the training institution.

4. Before convening IAGs, establish tools for collecting and reviewing feedback.

Before each meeting, ASDP created a list identifying the specific types of feedback needed. If feedback tools are designed in a straightforward way, it is easier to document relevant findings. See appendix 2 for a sample feedback form (in Arabic). Similarly, it is advisable to share materials such as course outlines with IAG participants before they arrive at the meeting. This way, they have already thought about their suggestions beforehand, making it more efficient to collect quality feedback and requiring less in-person time. Feedback tools should also be designed in a way that encourages IAGs to assess how training modules can best address the industry and employment needs and challenges of men and women.

In addition to the feedback tools, the ASDP team has found it advisable to appoint a note-taker in each meeting to document topics discussed, key decisions made, and any other information that may become useful in future meetings.

5. Continued participation from individuals is key to maintaining continuity throughout the IAG process.

If an IAG has different members from meeting to meeting, it is difficult to maintain continuity in the discussions. It is advisable to gain a commitment from IAG participants, from the beginning, to participate in the IAGs over a given timeframe (e.g., a one-year term). Each time a representative is invited from a company, the same individual is invited by name.

During additional stakeholder forums, it is advisable to pay close attention to which participants are providing the most valuable feedback so that the best contributors are selected for the IAG. It is also necessary to ensure gender balance in the selection of participants, which may require follow-up efforts for industries in which women are less numerous or less likely to participate in stakeholder fora or networking events. Being selective in this way helps to ensure the right balance of perspectives and experience.

6. Smaller numbers yield the best results.

The ASDP team found that an IAG should not exceed five members, as it becomes too difficult to keep discussions on track and consolidate ideas. Rather than striving to gain a greater number of perspectives, it is more important to focus efforts toward selecting participants who will provide the highest quality feedback.

7. Gender-balanced IAGs produce better quality feedback.

The ASDP team found that women members of IAGs brought ideas to the table that may not have been considered without their engagement. This is especially true for discussing how women's participation (or non-participation) and leadership in a particular industry can be addressed while planning for internship opportunities, such as how to reduce the barriers preventing women's access to, success in, and benefit from these industries.

8. Training institutions should be flexible in the timing of IAGs to accommodate participants.

As with any advisory group, convening professionals from various settings to come together at one table is difficult because of time limitations. ASDP holds IAG meetings after 5pm. As securing participants' full participation at the end of a work day is difficult, the length of these meetings is limited to no more than two hours. This timing may also be more difficult for women who may need to balance their professional work with household responsibilities. Accordingly, when identifying a time and location for IAGs, the training institution should consider all participants' ease of access, and that additional supports such as transportation and child care may also be necessary to ensure full participation.

9. Regular IAG meetings are opportunities to strengthen networking and build relationships.

In addition to being the main mechanisms for reviewing and updating curricula, the ASDP team has found that IAG meetings are important venues for strengthening ASDP's network and building industry relationships for the longer term.

Conclusion

IAGs are useful mechanisms for developing quality training programs that equip young men and women for jobs based on the input of key labour market stakeholders. They can also contribute to training insititutions' organizational learning processes. As ASDP continues to implement program activities, its team will continue to generate lessons from IAGs that will help the program and its partners deliver quality programs for Aswan's youth. ASDP will continue to document and share its experience with IAGs and other approaches that strengthen skills development programs.

Undertaken with the financial support of:

INDUSTRY ADVISORY GROUP (IAG)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The Om Habibeh Foundation (OHF) is implementing a five-years' skills development initiative in collaboration with Canadian and local partners in Aswan governorate. The Aswan Skills Development Program (ASDP) focuses on strengthening the quality and range of vocational and technical training programs, as well as professional development programs available to young women and men in Aswan Governorate.

ASDP aims to improve the knowledge and services available to young women and men as they transition from education or under/unemployment into training and from training to work or entrepreneurship. ASDP builds on the success of Om Habibeh Foundation's Continuing Education Centre (CEC) which, since its inception in 2010, has become a leader in English language and IT training in Aswan as well as in Upper Egypt.

Purpose / Rationale

Industry Advisory Groups are the CEC's chief means of providing advice on the currency and relevance of its continuing education programs and an effective means to facilitate input from our larger community.

Principles

1. The Industry Advisory Group will be established for the purpose of:
   a) providing the CEC with advice on skills required by male and female graduates to gain meaningful employment
   b) advising the CEC on current labour market trends, including information about workplace trends relevant specifically to men and women
   c) providing a valuable link to the CEC community for capacity-building
2. The Industry Advisory Group will be co-chaired by:
   a) a member of the committee on a rotating basis known as the **Co-Chair (Industry)**
   b) the CEC Director known as the **Co-Chair (CEC**)
3. The Industry Advisory Group will meet at a minimum twice annually.
4. Members will be appointed for a term of up to two years with a provision for renewal.
5. All IAGs should have a comprehensive spectrum of field expertise that includes male and female members from the following groups:
   a) employers of graduates
   b) licensing and accreditation bodies
   c) representatives of professional associations
   d) alumni working in the field
   e) women leaders in the industry

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities of the CEC

a) Identify the programs or areas for which an Industry Advisory Group will be established
b) Establish a formal process for the appointment of Industry Advisory Group members
c) Take minutes, develop agendas, maintain current lists of Industry Advisory Group members, track membership term dates and distribute meeting notifications (dates and times)

Responsibilities of the Industry Advisory Group Co-Chairs

a) Chair meetings of the Industry Advisory Group
b) Establish the agendas, with the aid of the Co-Chair (CEC), based on the terms of reference of the Industry Advisory Group
c) Facilitate discussions in line with the mandate of the Industry Advisory Group

Responsibilities of the Co-Chair (CEC)

a) Perform the duties and responsibilities of the Industry Co-Chair when the Industry Co-Chair is unable to do so

Responsibilities of Members

a) Attend and actively and appropriately engage as a member of the IAG within the mandate
b) Notify the designated CEC contact and the Industry Advisory Group Chair when unable to attend

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE FEEDBACK FORM (ARABIC ONLY)

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مجموعة

مدى احتياج السوق للمسارات المطروحة ؟

- على المجموعة ان تناقش المسارات المذكورة فى الجدول وتحديد ما اذا كانت هذة المسارات مطلوبة ام لا ؟
- فى حاله ما اذا كانت مطلوبة نضع علامة √ فى خانة نعم واذا كانت غير مطلوبة نضع علامة X فى خانة لا.

المسار	نعم	لا	ملاحظة \ اضافة
التسويق والمبيعات			

هل هناك مسارات اخرى لم يتم اداراجها ؟

- على المجموعة ان تناقش ما اذا كان لديها اقتراحات بمسارات اخرى على ان يتم الاستعانة بالجدول التالى :

المسار	التخصص	الفئة المستهدفة	ملاحظات \ اضافات	
			موضوعات الدراسة المقترحة	عدد الساعات

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مراجعة الاطار العام للمسار(التسويق والمبيعات)

اولا طريقة العرض : على المجموعة ان تحدد ايهما انسب ؟ بوضع علامة (√) او (X)

مجموعة موحدة من الموضوعات	موضوعات اساسية وموضوعات مختارة

ثانيا الموضوعات المطروحات للدراسة فى كل مسار تدريبى : على المجموعة ان تحدد من خلال التالى : موضوعات مناسبة
نضع علامة (√) موضوعات تحذف نضع علامة (X) موضوعات تضاف : تذكر فى الخانة المخصصة لذلك

ثالثا عدد الساعات المطروحة لكل موضوع : على المجموعة ان تحدد ما اذا كان عدد الساعات مناسب بوضع علامة (√) او
عدد الساعات يحتاج الى زيادة او تقليل برجاء ذكر عدد الساعات المقترح او البديل فى الخانة المخصصة لذلك

عدد الساعات Hours			الموضوعات Subject			Modules
تقليل Decrease	زيادة Increase	مناسبة OK	تضاف Add	تحذف Remove	مناسبة Ok	الموضوعات
Improve your selling skills						
Establish a market strategy						
Achieve success in marketing						
Customer relationship management						
Problem solving & decision making						
Communication and interpersonal skills						
Influence						
Time management						
Negotiation skills						
Develop competition strategy						
عدد الساعات Hours			الموضوعات Subject			Modules
تقليل Decrease	زيادة Increase	مناسبة OK	تضاف Add	تحذف Remove	مناسبة Ok	الموضوعات
General English						
Internet						
How to write your CV						
How to pass an interview						
Excel & Access						

[iv]

ملاحظات \ Comment:

ثالثا أسئلة عامة للمسار تدريبى :

1. هل أهداف هذا التدريب كافية لتمكين المتدربين من الحصول على وظيفة في مجال (ذكر المجال)؟

    نعم ( )   لا( )

    فى حالة الاجابة ب (لا)، من فضلك اذكر السبب؟

    _____

2. هل من الممكن أن توظف أحد خريجى هذا التدريب من الذكور؟

    نعم( )   لا( )

    فى حالة الاجابة ب (لا)، من فضلك اذكر السبب؟

    _____

3. هل من الممكن أن توظف أحد خريجات هذا التدريب من الاناث؟

    نعم( )   لا( )

    فى حالة الاجابة ب (لا)، من فضلك اذكر السبب؟

    _____

4. ما هي التحديات التي يواجهها العاملون في قطاع (مع ذكر أسم القطاع) ؟ كيف يتمكن لهذا التدريب الحد من هذه التحديات؟

    _____
    _____

5. ما هي التحديات التي تواجهها الاناث في قطاع (مع ذكر أسم القطاع)؟ كيف يتمكن لهذا التدريب الحد من هذه التحديات؟

    _____
    _____

[v]