

2009 SESSION REPORT

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Breaking the youth poverty cycle: Education, employment and entrepreneurship in the EuroMed and empowering children and young people to co-create strategies and opportunities in Europe

Moderator: Raymond Georis, Universal Education Foundation

Speakers: Darren Bird, Funky Dragon (Young People's Parliament, Wales)
Salvatore Nigro, Education for Employment Foundation (EFE)
Assad Ramlawi, Director of Public Health, Ministry of Health, Palestine
Ahmed Younis, Silatech

Designed by: Education for Employment Foundation, Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento, and Universal Education Foundation.

Chaired by **Raymond Georis**, the session explored how foundations and their partners are creating successful and empowering opportunities for young people through education, entrepreneurship and employment-driven initiatives in the Euro-Mediterranean region and in Wales, two regions with different contexts and challenges. As Mr Georis stressed, it is only through active participation that young people can acquire the sense of well-being and the skills necessary to be active partners in shaping their own lives and their environment both now and in the future. Listening to children and young people, their empowerment and creating a dialogue between generations are all key elements to break the youth poverty cycle and to create better opportunities for young people and society as a whole both in Europe and the Mediterranean region. It is therefore essential that foundations and other stakeholders devote further efforts and resources to these areas.

The session was divided into two parts, which featured different ways of empowering children and/or young people. The first part focused on the entrepreneurship-employment crisis in the Mediterranean region, notably in the Middle East and North Africa, and the challenges for the economic and social inclusion of young people that result from it. The second part presented two examples (Wales and Palestine) of ways in which young people are empowered to make their needs heard, and voice the opportunities that will allow them to be actors in changing their lives and improving their learning environments.

With 60% of the population under 24 years old, the Mediterranean region has a 35% youth unemployment rate, the highest in the world. In response to this challenge, the two initiatives presented work to empower young people to find jobs in their countries by creating links between youth training and the job market and developing partnerships involving a wide variety of public and private stakeholders at all levels.

Using a short video (see <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/427/video.html>) Salvatore Nigro introduced the model of the **Education for Employment Foundation (EFE)**. With the support of business, government, education and civic leaders, EFE sets up sustainable, independent local foundations which, in close cooperation with local partners, design and run training and job placement programs.

Firstly, the foundation and its partners identify sectors of the economy in which there is a solid potential for growth and job creation but a lack of appropriately-qualified personnel. A second step is to design tailor-made training and job placement programs in cooperation with businesses, which fund training and commit jobs at the end of the process. Since becoming operational in 2004, EFE trains around 1,000 people per year in Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, West Bank, Gaza, and Yemen and places 85% of them in well paid jobs. The objective is to develop a

model that allows each program to be scaled up and replicated. Mr Nigro invited participants to cooperate with the Education for Employment Foundation to scale up the model in the region.

As explained by Ahmed Younis, the **Silatech** “movement” (<http://www.silatech.com/en>) –which means in Arabic “your connection”- works to engage the public, private and civil society sectors in the promotion of large-scale job creation, entrepreneurship and access to capital and markets. There are three levels of action:

- Improving young people's access to demand driven and market-oriented skills training and job placement services. This is done in cooperation with partners such as EFE Foundation.
- Advocating for policy change by talking to decision-makers and opinion-shapers.
- Changing society's paradigm on young people and youth's views on society and the challenges encountered.

An important aspect of Silatech's work consists in identifying, scaling up and increasing the effectiveness of already existing resources and initiatives in the region and worldwide. To contribute to this, a “knowledge consortium”, including actors such as the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank, has been created. Several initiatives have been launched including the “Silatech index” – the first scientific survey outlining country by country the ideas, perspectives and challenges of young people in the region-, and the “youth knowledge labs”, which, acting as think tanks, gather existing data and engage with relevant actors to bring change.

Both panellists made an appeal for foundations and other actors to contribute to addressing the employment crisis in the region, as a way of breaking the youth poverty circle and confronting the poverty challenge. Young people can only contribute to their country's economic and social development if they are given the opportunity to find a job and build a life in their countries. There is also a risk of instability in the region if there is frustration and a lack of motivation among young people. For all these reasons it is necessary to act now. The World Bank estimates that by 2020, up to 80 million new jobs need to be created simply to keep current employment levels and approximately 100 million to provide full employment.

In the second part of the session, panellists presented two initiatives in Wales and Palestine. Darren Bird shared with participants the experience of **Funky Dragon, the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales** (<http://www.funkydragon.org>). Created in 1999, this young persons-led organisation aims to make the voices of children and young people aged from 0 – 25 years old heard, particularly by the Welsh Assembly Government, and to support their participation in decision-making to achieve real change. Young people are the target group but also the key actors of Funky Dragon and its initiatives. They are involved in all of the organisation's structures, including the management committee. In fact, Funky Dragon is the first organisation in British history with under-18's as trustees. The organisation aims to be as representative as possible of Welsh youth, including the “hard-to-reach” groups.

To pursue its mission, Funky Dragon contributes directly to policy consultation processes and has two official meetings a year with the government. They also undertake research and projects and Mr Bird presented as an example Funky Dragon's contribution to the reporting process on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which takes place every 5 years and in which NGOs are invited to submit reports alongside governments. As part of this process, Funky Dragon developed the project “*Our rights, our story*” to analyse if and how young people in Wales were able to access their rights. Young people were in charge of developing the project methods and the questionnaire used to gather input from over 12,000 children and young people. High expectations were created regarding the outcomes, which have been presented to the United Nations in Geneva and to the Welsh government.

Making the voices of children heard was also the aim of the “**Education by All for the Well-being of Children**” programme in Palestine launched by **Universal Education Foundation**. The first phase consisted of the “**Voice of Children**” survey designed to capture the voices of young people in Palestine (and also in Jordan and Lebanon) about how they feel that school as a learning environment impacts on their well-being. Young people were involved in defining the issues and questions, analysing the outcomes and highlighting the areas of concern for attention by the policy makers.

The objective of the second part of the project, “ELHAM” (which means inspiration in Arabic) was to find inspiring examples of how children and young people across Palestine have taken over responsibility, with the help of teachers, school counsellors and all school staff, to shape their environment in such a way that they are empowered in the present and for future experiences. As an example, a video of a project undertaken by students to advocate to local government and civil society for the eradication of a solid waste disposal site in their village in West Bank was shown. Young people also took an active role in the evaluation of the nominations for ELHAM - some 900 nominations were received (<http://www.elham.ps>).

As **Assad Ramlawi** outlined, the ELHAM initiative was an inclusive process involving, alongside young people and the Universal Education Foundation, the Palestinian Ministries of Health and Education, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) and three Palestinian NGOs. He explained how the concept and ideas of the initiative had really quickly been accepted by the government. They are fully aware that giving a voice to young people and empowering them so that they commit themselves to change is essential to improve their well-being and move forward in areas such as prevention in school, health education, environmental health and nutrition. In this sense he would like to see ELHAM as a programme running every year and this is what the government have decided to do. He concluded with a call for support for young people, which are “our hope and our future”.

Other key issues brought up by panellists and participants were as follows:

- The relations with governments and the role of philanthropy in advocating/influencing policy-making in these areas.
- The barriers encountered to implement the initiatives presented (accreditation of programmes, psychological barriers, etc.)
- The importance of having statistics and data on the issues to be addressed.
- The risk of focusing on small projects and not scaling up. Participants mentioned the importance of multi-sector partnerships and objectives-oriented actions and initiatives as critical elements to ensure that the models achieve results and can be scaled-up.
- It is crucial that young people gain the skills to participate in shaping their own futures. Only in this way can philanthropists create strategies with youth which involve and empower them with opportunities to fight the causes and symptoms of poverty in ways that fit their context and fulfill their aspirations.