

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB  
and the Goethe Institute host:

## **Studying Youth in the Arab World**

A two-day Seminar: January 13-14, 2009

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut and the Goethe Institute are inaugurating an annual seminar on *Studying Youth in the Arab World*. With a long-standing tradition of social research to draw on, IFI and Goethe aim to bring together individuals and institutions in the fields of policy-making, civil society, the corporate world and scholarship to assess and propose research priorities and to explore how research can influence policy more effectively.

### **Background**

*“The discourses of the state, the mass media, pundits and professional commentators tend, on the whole, to position Middle Eastern youth as lacking in agency, needing protection and requiring the tutelage of state institutions, experts and the nationalist intelligentsia. While such discourses are correct in their understanding that youth are in a position of dependency on their elders and the institutions they control, what about youths’ own motivations and desires?”<sup>1</sup>*

Youth in the Arab region have landed firmly on the international development and policy map. From Washington, D.C. to Arab capitals in Egypt and the Gulf, calls are being made to address the opportunities and challenges that this growing population cohort present, and to shift the political and policy discourse from the fight against Islamic radicalism to how to build a future for the region’s majority.

Up until two generations ago, it was customary to marry young people soon after the onset of puberty and to give them adult responsibilities. Most of the grandparents and some of the parents of today’s Arab “youth” did not experience a transition phase between adolescence and adulthood. Effectively, in many Arab countries today, the “youth” category is still not recognized and adolescents are expected to take on the roles and responsibilities of adults – marrying, raising families, seeking gainful employment, and caring for the elderly in the household.

With increasing policy attention on this group and its growing perception as a problem by Western observers and Arab states alike, there is greater need for in-depth and qualitative study of how young people see themselves and their role in society, and conversely how society sees them. More studies are needed to understand how they experience the transition from childhood to adulthood, and interact with the people and institutions they have been, and continue to be,

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Swedenburg, “Imagined Youths,” Middle East Report, Winter 2007.

dependent on. There are large gaps in detailed and accurate data on their living conditions, self-image, aspirations, hopes and fears.

### **Seminar Aims**

The Research and Policy Forum on Youth in the Arab World at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) aims to be a meeting point, catalyst and central repository for regional and international research and policy analysis on Arab youth. It draws on the policy-related research of the American University of Beirut's internationally respected faculty in order to achieve its goals. AUB has more than 20 scholars in different faculties who work on various youth-related policy and research issues, including

- ♦ Identity
- ♦ Unemployment
- ♦ Migration
- ♦ Reproductive health
- ♦ Sexuality
- ♦ Mental health and substance abuse
- ♦ Education
- ♦ Leisure and consumption
- ♦ Political activism
- ♦ Community engagement

Since 1953, the Youth Foundation of German Shell has been conducting a comprehensive youth study in Germany. Teenagers and adolescents are extensively interviewed about their values and attitudes towards the future. The youth study is widely respected as an independent, detailed assessment of young people in Germany. It is compiled by social scientists and a team of social research experts, and the co-author of the 14th and 15th Shell Youth Study will be in Beirut to share his expertise with the seminar participants.

IFI and the Goethe Institute in Lebanon are joining forces to bring youth sector researchers together on January 13-14, 2009 to launch an annual seminar on *Studying Youth in the Arab World*.

The seminar aims to provide a regular platform for indigenous and international researchers to present their work, exchange ideas, identify critical knowledge gaps and discuss different methodological approaches to studying youth. Its deliberations and recommendations will help shape the agendas of other workshops and seminars that IFI will sponsor throughout the year.

### **Agenda -- Tuesday, January 13, 2009**

*08:30-09:00 Registration*

*09:00-09:45 Introduction to the Seminar*

Rami Khouri, IFI  
Abdallah Annan, Goethe Institute in Lebanon

*Opening Remarks: Framing the Research Agenda*  
Dr. Samir Khalaf, American University of Beirut

*09:45-11:00 Session 1 – Arab Youth: An International Concern, Regional Priority?*

Dr. Mathias Albert, co-author of the 14th and 15th Shell Youth Study, University of Bielefeld

*Middle East Youth Initiative*  
Paul Dyer, Research Associate, Dubai School of Government

Roundtable Discussion

*11:00-11:30 Coffee Break*

*11:30-13:00 Session 2 – Implications for Youth Research and Policies: UNESCO Lebanon National Youth Profile*

*Linking Research and the Policy Process*  
Rindala Abdel Baki

*Lessons Learned from the Lebanon National Youth Profile*  
Dr. Ramzi Salame and Dr. Riad Tabbarah

*Youth Social Inclusion*  
Dr. Adnan El Amine

Roundtable Discussion

*13:00-14:30 Lunch break*

*14:30-16:00 Session 3 – Arab Youth and Economic Exclusion*

*The Costs of Youth Exclusion in the Arab Region*  
Dr. Jad Chaaban, AUB

*Youth Economic Participation in Kuwait*  
Dr. Rola Dashti, Kuwait Economic Society  
Roundtable Discussion

**Agenda -- Wednesday, January 14, 2009**

09:30-11:00 *Session 4 – Surveying Youth in the Arab Region*

*The Arab Youth Voice: A Gallup Survey of Opinions & Visions for the Future*

Ahmed Younis, Gallup Center for Muslim Studies

Roundtable Discussion

11:00-11:30 *Coffee Break*

11:30-13:00 *Session 5 – Arab Youth and Political Engagement*

*Youth and Democratic Change in Lebanon*

Dr. Farid el Khazen, AUB

*Youth-less Change: Youth Political Participation in Lebanon*

Jamil Mouawad, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies

Roundtable Discussion

13:00-14:30 *Lunch Break*

14:30-1600 *Session 6 – Changing Values among Youth*

*Surveying Arab “Youth”: Beyond the Policy Discourse*

Zina Sawaf, IFI

*Identity and Co-existence among Youth in Jordan*

Dr. Musa Shteivi, University of Jordan

*Youth Engagement in Egypt’s Islamic Charity Organizations*

Ms. Noha Abou el-Gheit, Resala Charity Organization, Egypt

Roundtable Discussion