Implications of Widening Access to Education in the Arab World: Implementing a Holistic Lifelong Learning Policy
Lecture by Dina Kiwan
March 11th, 2015

IFI's Research and Public Policy-making Program hosted Dr. Dina Kiwan, an Associate Professor at AUB's Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies, as part of its series on Social Policies in the Arab World. Dr. Kiwan presented on the "*Implications of Widening Access to Education in the Arab World: Implementing a Holistic Lifelong Learning Policy*".

Dr. Kiwan highlighted the changes in higher education that the US and the Arab region have witnessed recently. She explained that the massification of higher education has spread globally, and the US was among the first to experience this global trend. It was demonstrated that the massification of higher education was a response to the demands of the people. However, this global trend does not address issues of diversity, quality, equity and access to higher education. The rise of massification was paralleled with an increase in the privatization of universities, which in turn shed light on the shortage in funding.

Subsequently, Dr. Kiwan tackled higher education in the Arab region. She illustrated how higher education has expanded after the First and Second World Wars. Universities were then perceived as symbols of new national identity and national development. The rise of higher education was paralleled by several sociopolitical challenges, among which Kiwan enlisted knowledge deficit, centralization in governments, privatization of higher education, limited access, regional conflicts, gender inequality, increasing numbers of refugees in addition to age demography. Furthermore, Kiwan discussed conceptual issues pertaining to higher education. She questioned whether the universal right to higher education is in fact a right or a privilege. Also, she distinguished among several concepts, such as accessibility to higher education and the availability of resources, and "increasing" access and "widening" access and participation.

In her conclusion, Kiwan presented concrete suggestions that address the issues facing higher education systems in the Arab world. She stressed the positive effects brought to education by decentralized government systems and the importance of diversifying the means of access to higher education. According to Kiwan, widening access to higher education entails the provision of online education, increasing women enrollment in addition to reaching diversified students. So far, there has been more increase in access to higher education than widening, which has resulted in social, economic and gender inequalities of access to higher education. The system of education should be based on the concept of life-long learning. Quality assurance mechanisms ought to be maintained to ensure the acceleration of both public and private universities. Finally, Kiwan suggested that public funding should be extended to include private universities.

For more information on Dr. Kiwan's lecture, please watch the video or stay tuned for the upcoming Policy Brief.