

GLOBAL EDUCATION BUSINESS BRIEF

# Transforming Universities, Increasing Employability:

The cases of Guatemala, Honduras,  
Jamaica, Afghanistan, and Morocco

---

Yolande Miller-Grandvaux, Ph D

Global Education, FHI 360



GLOBAL EDUCATION BUSINESS BRIEF<sup>1</sup>

# **Transforming Universities, Increasing Employability:**

The cases of Guatemala, Honduras,  
Jamaica, Afghanistan, and Morocco

---

This brief was written with the invaluable contributions of the following FHI 360 colleagues:

Zabi Girowal, Alejandra de Freitas, Kristin Brady, Jason Kelleher, Jeffrey Matu, Leila Abu-Gheida, Shahera Youssef Younes, Uzma Anzar, Alexandra Balafrej, Julee Allen, Jessica Jester Quijada, Carmen Henriquez, Michael Tetelman

1. FHI360 Global Education Business Brief's promote awareness of an approach that led to specific, targeted program outcomes.

# INTRODUCTION

---

Youth from low income, conflict and violence-affected environments are eager to acquire the skills necessary to join the labor market. Higher education institutions struggle to provide underserved youth with the knowledge and training they need to become employable. Such challenges were overcome in five different countries across three continents. From 2014 to 2020, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and FHI 360 worked in Afghanistan, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Morocco to help vulnerable youth enroll in universities and to equip them with the skills and opportunities to enter the workforce or pursue further education. To increase the employability of students, higher education institutions adapt their systems and services to incorporate state-of-the-art technical education and opened their doors to new partners. What made such transformations so successful?

## ABSTRACT

*Can universities adapt their systems and services to offer technical education to underserved youth who want to become employable? From 2014 to 2020, the United States Agency for International Development contracted FHI 360 to help universities in Afghanistan, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica and Morocco provide access to higher education institutions and technical training to vulnerable youth. Universities and technical education providers had to transform their traditional structures to align their learning, teaching and operations to the needs of the labor market. This business brief makes the case that such transformation can be achieved. Across three continents and five countries, universities successfully transitioned traditional higher education structures towards providing relevant and state-of-the art technical training to increase the employability of the youth they serve.*

# HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND TECHNICAL TRAINING COMPLEXITIES

---

Universities play a vital economic and social role as the source of a highly educated national workforce. Technical education plays an equally crucial economic and social role in enabling underserved youth to join the middle skill workforce and move up the ladder of social mobility. Employers decry the challenges of finding talent equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in the 21st century workplace. Students want to receive an education that will prepare them for employment and steer them towards remunerative careers. Communities and parents see universities as a costly but necessary investment. The relationships between these stakeholders are complex indeed.

Universities and technical education providers tend to operate separately, yet they pursue similar education goals, share comparable management processes, and face the same challenges of relevance, self-reliance, and autonomy. They often need to transform their identity, capacity, and internal processes to provide quality, relevant, and inclusive education to all youth. Today, the question is whether – and if so, how – universities and technical education systems and services can transform to align learning, teaching and labor market bridging, so that students develop their fullest potential as economic and social actors, thinkers, and leaders.

# THE INSTITUTIONAL, FINANCIAL, AND CULTURAL HURDLES TO TRANSFORMATION

---

Long standing institutional, financial, and cultural practices have hindered universities' ability to offer two-year career and technical education programs or relevant career services. In Guatemala, Honduras, and Jamaica, technical education is widely perceived as the last resort for underserved students who cannot afford a 4-year university program. In Afghanistan, the government sees the need to build an educated workforce as an urgent economic and social priority and a pathway to stabilization and peace. In Morocco, universities struggle to provide their students with the work readiness skills, employment and internship opportunities that would help mitigate the high level of unemployment among higher education graduates. Economic and social inequalities have long led vulnerable students to understand they cannot equitably access or afford higher education, nor can they easily obtain remunerative employment. How did universities and technical education providers transform their systems and services to increase the employability of the youth they serve?



# RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS DROVE THE VISION

---

The five programs described below initially focused on state-of-the-art research and analysis to identify high-demand career clusters and promising partnerships with the private sector. From there, universities and technical education providers developed a vision of what they intended their students to achieve. In Jamaica, Guatemala, and Honduras, a



series of labor market assessments; institutional landscaping analyses; value chain and workforce overlay studies; and trade share and product space analyses were conducted and used to identify which economic sectors showed a high demand for technical education graduates. In Afghanistan, the **University Support and Workforce Development Program** (USWDP) program conducted Employers' Market Assessments, which were used to ground the creation of new, data-driven programs. In Morocco, the program conducted market analyses for high-demand industries such as textile, solar energy, and port logistics as the basis for engagement with the private sector. Each country used their findings to inform ongoing dialogue between government agencies, universities, and industry experts, while faculty and staff learned how to conduct these analyses and utilize the data. As a result, universities and their technical education departments created new or revamped curricula and updated their teaching and learning methodologies to align with the labor market needs in high-growth industries.

# AFGHANISTAN: USWDP



**2,722**

Ministry of Higher Education and university level officials

**551**

including **551 female leaders**, were trained on academic and organizational development topics.



**360**

In addition, **360 professors (69 female faculty members)** benefitted from trainings provided by Professional Exchange Programs between Afghan and U.S. Universities.



**30**

The program worked with more than **30 academic degree programs**, many newly formed, enrolling

**5,100** students,

including **1,575 female students**, and **1,357 graduated**, including **363 female students**.



Thanks to scholarships **68 faculty members** were able to update and improve their academic credentials.

**54 scholarships** were provided to females to enroll in local Afghan higher education institutions and complete a degree.



**7,930**  
students

USWDP successfully established **10 Career Centers** at participating universities. As a result, a total of **7,930 students** received training on career counseling and other job preparedness skills (**2,850 females**).

**1,345**  
students

Thanks to USWDP, a total of **1,345 students (479 females)** participated in internships with various INGOs or local businesses.

# INDUSTRIES AND UNIVERSITIES ENGAGED IN COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

---

The model used for the Advance program in Jamaica, Guatemala, and Honduras incrementally led faculty, administrators, students, employers, consultants, curriculum developers, trainers, and counselors to break down the social and institutional walls that had previously halted progress. They collaborated to develop a variety of technical training programs that would make students employable within two or three years. In Jamaica, students now enroll in technical programs such as Entertainment and Events Management, Agroforestry, or Health and Wellness Tourism, all of which are directly linked to the needs of current economic actors. A different model was used in Afghanistan, where university-industry advisory councils were formed with private investors, businessmen, representatives of associations and unions, faculty deans, chancellors, and vice-chancellors in ten universities, which led to public-private partnerships. The councils provided career advice to students and helped to arrange internships and apprenticeships that introduced practical work experience as part of academic programs. Morocco's [USAID Career Centers](#) project used a different

transformational model and started from the ground up, in a process that included engaging youth at every step to open and grow career centers into large networks connected to the private sector. In all five countries, the higher education institutions put internal structures in place to institutionalize the partnerships.





# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN JAMAICA, HONDURAS AND GUATEMALA

---

The **Advance Program** combined professional development for professors and instructors with the development of new and relevant curricula, which improved the capacity of faculty to learn, teach, engage with industry, and support students. Over the course of several years, Advance helped revise or develop new curriculum in collaboration with employers



and industry experts and inter-departmental task teams. These partnerships ensured that the curriculum retained its competency-based focus and its connection to labor market demands. As a result, the curriculum and courses now incorporate soft skills training, active teaching methods, private sector engagement, positive youth development approaches, and multiple intelligence theory and practice. As faculty engaged in industry tours and dialogues with private sector firms, they learned how to integrate this new knowledge into more effective pedagogical approaches. In Honduras, faculty members mastered strategies to boost the academic performance of students and reduce student dropouts. In Guatemala, faculty worked with the Associations of Managers of Guatemala to better understand entrepreneurship and start up business models. In Jamaica, digital media and entrepreneurship were included in the curriculum in response to industry demands. The programs customized their approaches to fit each country's context and align professional development programs to educators' needs.

# ADVANCE DATA



19

**curriculum revisions**  
in technical education completed

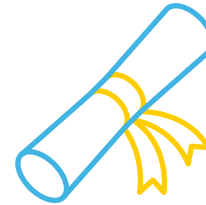
2,287

**students** receiving labor bridging, i.e., internships, entrepreneurship workshops, employers' visits, and career fairs



622

**faculty and university staff** trained in how to organize and deliver workshops, study tours, externships, working with private sector representatives



2,656

**youth** enrolled in degree programs



1,114

**students** from underserved and/or disadvantaged groups enrolled in degree programs

326

**scholarships** were awarded to disadvantaged students, including indigenous students to cover tuition, meals, and transportation



# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN AFGHANISTAN

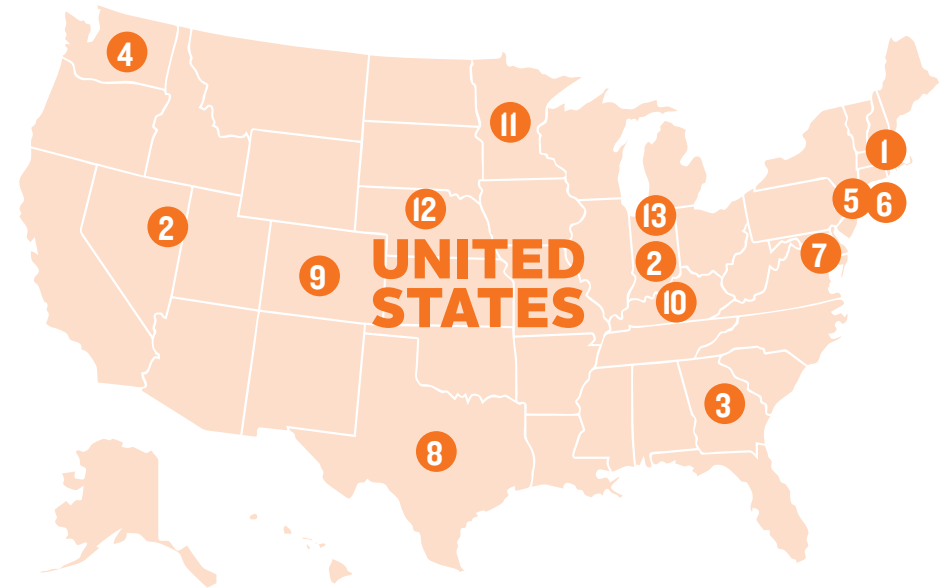
---

The transformation of the quality of teaching in Afghan universities was incremental and focused on developing the academic and pedagogical skills of the faculty members and tailoring them to specific academic programs. The most impactful strategy was to introduce Afghan faculty to the concept of a modern curriculum that includes soft skills, state of the art pedagogical practices, information technology support, and student assessment capability. Faculty received in-country training on topics such as quality assurance, curriculum reform and development, research, library management and usage, critical thinking skills, lecturing skills, gender inclusion, as well as the basic protocols of counseling, and, in some cases, psychotherapy. Afghan university professors engaged with U.S. universities' professors and gained the latest pedagogical knowledge in their areas of focus through over 50 professional development exchange activities. To this day, faculty in technical training and university programs maintain institutional links with employers through firmly established university-industry advisory councils. As a result, students learned to develop soft skills

to prepare themselves for jobs. Whether in English, Dari, or Pashtu, students learned to develop resume-writing skills, communication skills and strong work ethics, all of which are key to employability and employment retention. Students, including young women, also earned internships, exposing them to the world of work for the first time.



# USWDP PARTNER HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



- 1. Balkh University
- 2. Herat University
- 3. Kabul Polytechnic University (KPU)
- 4. Kabul University
- 5. Kabul University of Medical Sciences (KUMS) (formerly Kabul Medical University)
- 6. Kandahar University
- 7. Kunduz University
- 8. Nangarhar University
- 9. Shaheed Rabbani Education University (SREU)
- 10. Sheikh Zayed University (Khost)
- 11. Jawzjan University was added as an eleventh university in 2017

- 1. University of Massachusetts (UMass), Purdue University, Johns Hopkins University (JHU)
  - 2. Ball State University (BSU)
  - 3. Central Georgia Technical College (CGTC)
  - 4. Community Colleges of Spokane (CCS)
  - 5. ELS Educational Services Inc.
  - 6. Hunter College
  - 7. Johns Hopkins University (JHU)
  - 8. Texas A&M University (TAMU)
  - 9. University of Denver
  - 10. University of Kentucky (UKY)
  - 11. University of Minnesota (UMN)
  - 12. University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO)
  - 13. University of Notre Dame (UND)
- Other partners in the implementation of university partnerships include:

# PROVIDING CAREER TRAINING AND OPPORTUNITIES IN MOROCCO

---

The approach adopted by the USAID Career Center project differed from the other two models, as it focused on building the capacity of career center staff, rather than professors, and helped build a new and relevant curriculum. The Moroccan government and university staff engaged the private sector to inform both the development and the roll out of the career centers. Staff were trained in the effective administration of career centers through sessions on alumni engagement, negotiating with the private sector, entrepreneurship, and workforce readiness. They integrated the workforce readiness modules and tools, branded as *Najahi*, into the Career Centers' curriculum. The curriculum also incorporated foundational soft skills modules such as "Managing my Emotions and my Stress," "Working as a Team," "Me and Problem Solving" and "Negotiate with Gusto". The relevance of the content is so high that the Automobile Industry Training Institute now requires all trainees to take 16 hours of *Najahi*, and all 300 technical institutes of the National Office of Technical Education and Work Promotion offer the *Najahi* curriculum. The Career Centers Counsellors, now a profession, promote

the career centers at regional forums and fairs, engage in research on industry analysis, and continue the integration of soft-skills training into host-institutions curricula.



# THREE TARGET REGIONS

Casablanca, Marrakech, Tangier



6

Pilot Career Centers



3

Satellite Career Centers



6

New centers opening soon



75,601

registered beneficiaries on the Virtual Career Center site

# BENEFICIARIES



242,521

unique beneficiaries of Career Center services (online and offline)

147.95%

of target achieved

# SERVICES

24

work readiness modules "Najahi – Prêt pour l'emploi"

16

e-Learning modules on the Virtual Career Center site

1,297

Trainers trained to deliver Najahi in their institutions

41,962

Youth trained on work readiness

108.99%

of target achieved

91

programs informed by labor market information to improve the quality and relevancy of offerings

189.58%

of target achieved

154

completed workforce development initiatives as a result of USG participation in public-private partnerships

143.51%

of target achieved

# PARTNERSHIPS

309



private businesses partnered with educational institutions as a result of USG assistance

# EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

---

In Guatemala, Honduras, and Jamaica, universities reached out to underserved areas where youth are often forced to choose between migration to the United States, gang membership, or difficult rural livelihoods to survive economically and socially. University staff partnered with community organizations and secondary schools to recruit secondary school students into technical degree programs. Non-academic staff received training in recruitment and outreach strategies and were taught how to provide services tailored to vulnerable students to help them remain enrolled. In Guatemala, the Advance program helped counselors reach out to indigenous Mayan population and in Jamaica they tailored information to deaf youth. The programs offered scholarships for disadvantaged students, which covered full academic costs, as well as living costs, such as lodging, food, transportation, and Internet access to help students overcome financial barriers to higher education.

While the status of women in Afghanistan is one of the lowest in the world, universities are the first in line to play a leading role in reversing harmful practices. Kabul University championed the Non-Discrimination and Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy. Shaheed Rabbani Education University established a Gender Office and a Gender Committee, which led faculty and students to overcome a lack of trust towards the system of registering harassment complaints.

The Career Centers in Morocco deliberately put women and people with disabilities at the forefront of their inclusive approach by addressing barriers to female employment, providing resources about youth's rights and duties in the workplace, developing and delivering training on gender sensitivity and awareness of disability, and collaborating with local associations to organize events with youth that promote awareness and inclusiveness.

# TRANSFORMING THROUGH TRUST AND COMMITMENT

---

Each program allocated considerable time to building relationships and trust between partners who had never collaborated before. Faculty and students met with industry representatives through training workshops, informational meetings, conferences, and career fairs. In Jamaica, students enrolled in the health and wellness tourism program attended



the 2019 Jamaica Health and Wellness Tourism conference and made connections that led to internships.

In Afghanistan, where war and violence have weakened social cohesion and trusting relationships, universities managed to build a strong relationship with Chambers of Commerce and opened their doors to job fairs and industry representatives. They also built trust beyond borders through development exchange activities with American universities. The long-standing partnerships created a safe and trusting space for faculty to exchange and contribute to each other's academic performance.

In Morocco, the regular dialogue between industry and university administration and faculty over outreach activities, "sunrise briefings" or afterwork events, guest speaker appearances by the private sector, and company visits paid off. Four years into the program, the USAID Career Center project had partnered with 72 organizations across the country.



# CONCLUSION

---

Clearly, higher education institutions can transform their systems and services to provide youth with the skills and knowledge that they need to become successful economic and social actors. Each program implemented by FHI 360 with USAID funding shows a process of institutional transformation through which universities and technical training institutions aligned learning and career outcomes; adopted new training modalities; tailored their services to meet economic needs for a mid-level skilled workforce; and enabled youth to move up the economic and social ladder. These transformations did not happen overnight but were built systematically to serve youth eager to become the movers and shakers of tomorrow.

