

Impact Brief Series, Issue 14

Maharat Training for Employment

Business Development Center, Jordan

This brief describes how the **Business Development Centre (BDC) in Jordan**, a non-profit organization committed to fostering inclusive economic development in Jordan and the Middle East, is committed to results, progress and impact measurement through efficient, robust monitoring and evaluation systems. Focusing on equipping young people with tools, skills and knowledge, BDC's Maharat Training for Employment Programme is investing in Jordanian youth and women to help them become productive members of society, capable of obtaining jobs as well as becoming successful entrepreneurs. This not only improves their quality of life but also contributes to the well-being of their families and to society as a whole, with an ultimate positive effect on the country's national development. This brief illustrates the key challenges faced in creating and operating a fully-fledged monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system in light of strained resources, as well as lessons that other organizations can learn for a transition towards better results measurement, evidence generation and gender mainstreaming.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Buy-in:** Even when M&E is led by an independent unit within an organization, buy-in from programme and field staff is important for appropriate implementation of the M&E plan.
- **Evidence of successes and challenges:** With a properly designed results chain which reflects the theory of change, a robust M&E system can generate evidence of both programme successes to be maintained and pitfalls that need to be addressed.
- **Working with young people:** Evaluating youth projects can be difficult as young people tend to be mobile and often change contact details, which makes keeping track of them challenging. Perseverance in collecting data in a timely manner is needed.
- **Working with women and girls:** In order to foster female empowerment, gender topics should be mainstreamed throughout all programmes and project stages.

Background

BDC Jordan and the Maharat Training for Employment Programme

Established in 2004, BDC is a non-profit organization committed to fostering economic development and public reform in Jordan and the Middle East region. BDC has been at the forefront of various successful multi-million dollar projects, working with a network of multisectoral stakeholders – including business service providers, government entities, universities and international partners – to continue its mission of delivering effective development programmes.

Addressing both the constraints and the strengths inherent in helping young men and women realize their full potential, BDC's Maharat Training for Employment Programme was started in 2004. Maharat is delivered through a blend of effective market-responsive and holistic initiatives with the aim of bridging the gap between recent university graduates and opportunities in the labour market. This is achieved by helping young people become more familiar with the behavioural competencies of successful entrepreneurs; to look for, recognize and “code” those behaviours in themselves and in others; to strengthen and enhance the behaviours they choose to work on through practice and reinforcement; and finally to apply those behaviours in their own businesses.



BDC aims to mainstream gender equality throughout the Maharat programme, taking into account gender-specific needs and cultural barriers at the design stage, during the implementation of all activities, and during data collection and M&E. BDC has set a goal that at least 50 per cent of those targeted through the programme will be women.

Source: BDC.

Over the past 14 years, Maharat has been continuously adapted to fit the national labour market needs of young women and men. Through market information analyses and assessments of those needs, three different Maharat pillars were created: Maharat Employability for Graduates, Maharat Entrepreneurship and Maharat University. The initial M&E system covers the first two pillars.

Taqeem support

BDC's interest in improving its system for monitoring and measuring results was linked to a desire to visualize and bring to life the achievements of its young beneficiaries through data and performance monitoring. Unfortunately, BDC did not have an M&E system in place for the Maharat programme, nor sufficient human resources to shift time away from project implementation to the additional tasks of collecting, managing and analysing data. As a key challenge in carrying out M&E functions, BDC was interested in an efficient measurement system, with beneficiaries submitting self-administered

survey data along with disaggregation by gender and simple tools for visual analysis. The previous data collection process relied on paper-based event feedback forms and skills assessments for measuring the quality of training delivery. The process for collating the paper forms was labour intensive, taking up over 60 per cent of the M&E officers' already limited time.

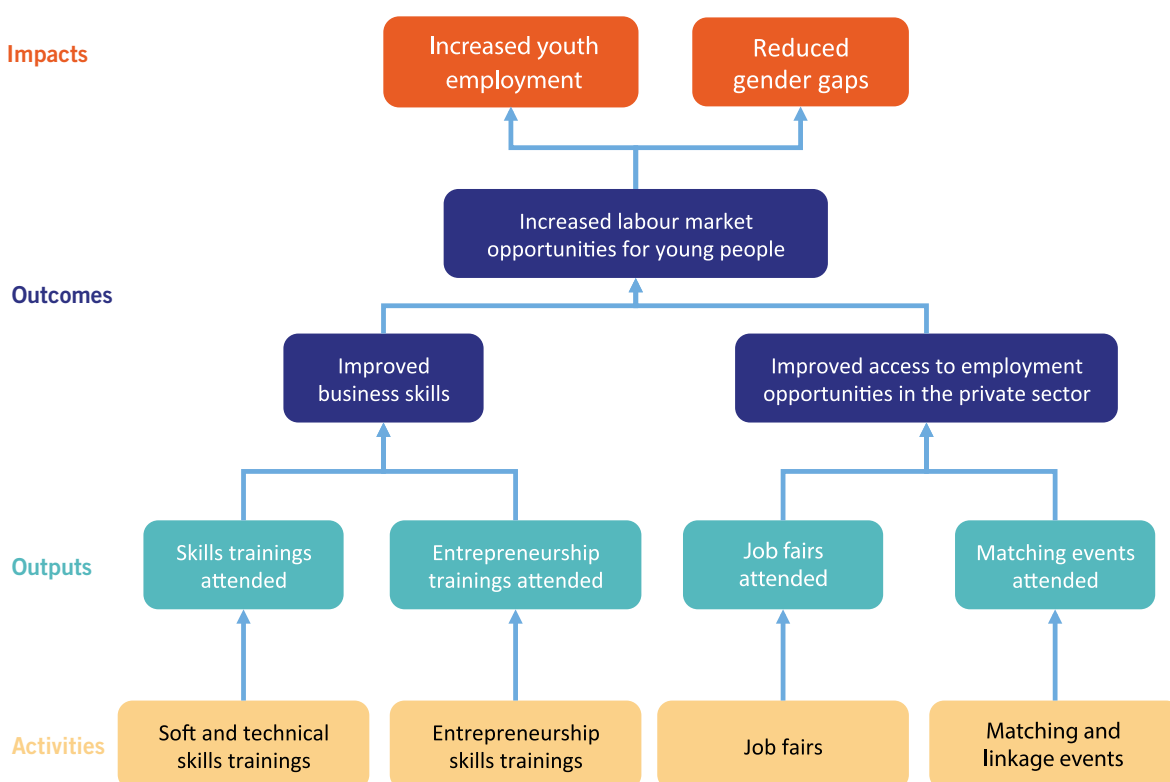
With this in mind, BDC Jordan joined the Taaqem Community of Practice to benefit from technical and financial support for their results measurement efforts. The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Taaqem Initiative worked with BDC, first to develop a logical results chain with gender-sensitive indicators for each result as a basis for a robust results measurement plan (RMP), and second to design efficient data collection instruments and train BDC staff in how to use these tools with minimum time and effort. Reducing the amount of time spent by M&E staff in requesting, collating and analysing feedback forms was a key objective that was taken into account. In addition to designing and implementing a robust RMP with smart data collection tools, BDC is interested in utilizing the RMP to generate evidence of programme achievements. Additionally, the lab, an ILO research and knowledge generation project on how to measure and maximize jobs while working in value chains and sectors, provided support to develop the M&E framework in compliance with the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCEd) Standard.

Monitoring and results measurement system

Setting out the logic

Through participation in Taaqem learning events and with support and advice from M&E experts, BDC was able to create a results chain to trace how activities would logically result in target outputs, outcomes and impacts, with clear vertical linkages (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Results chain of Maharat Training for Employment



The Maharat programme activities are designed to support both college graduates seeking work and entrepreneurs setting up new businesses. A common series of employment and employability training courses are delivered to help improve soft skills and business awareness. Additional activities such as networking events and job fairs are delivered, tailored to the specific needs and life ambitions of the different cohorts and sexes. To achieve good outcomes among women, for instance, the activities must be provided in an environment that is deemed suitable for women, especially in some governorates where gender-related cultural barriers are widespread and travelling on public transport can be an issue for women. Through awareness sessions and interviews, BDC aims at equitably targeting and addressing the needs of women, specifically those living in rural areas and/or in poverty.

Through a multi-pronged approach, the Maharat programme enhances the knowledge, technical, soft and entrepreneurial skills of its beneficiaries, as well as their access to market and employment opportunities. The programme’s activities are designed with the long-term goal of introducing fresh university graduates into the labour market, whether as private sector employees or entrepreneurs.

Data collection instruments

The new data collection system has led to a single format for the feedback form, which is distributed, collected and managed digitally. This prevents a large backlog of data on paper forms, allows for more efficient data collection and analysis, and ultimately improves the use of this data to enhance implementation. Table 1 describes the main indicators for the Maharat training programme, many of which are gender disaggregated and gender sensitive. This way, BDC aims to address issues around gender during data collection, data analysis and reporting.

TABLE 1. Short description of the new data collection instruments

Instrument	Main indicators	Descriptions
Facilitator observation rubric	% F/M young people who score at least 70% in a presentation about their business plan	Qualitative assessment of the quality and completeness of the business plans submitted by the entrepreneurs. BDC facilitators conduct the assessment.
Tracking form for business/employment	% of F/M young people reporting an increase in income (wage/ revenue) in comparison with baseline % F/M graduates (from cohort) who land a paid job (part/full time) within one year of finishing Maharat % F/M graduates remaining in the same paid job for at least six months/changing jobs for professional progression	Quantitative data that measure the baseline and endline employment and education of the graduates/entrepreneurs. Data are collected and recorded by the M&E team and programme staff.

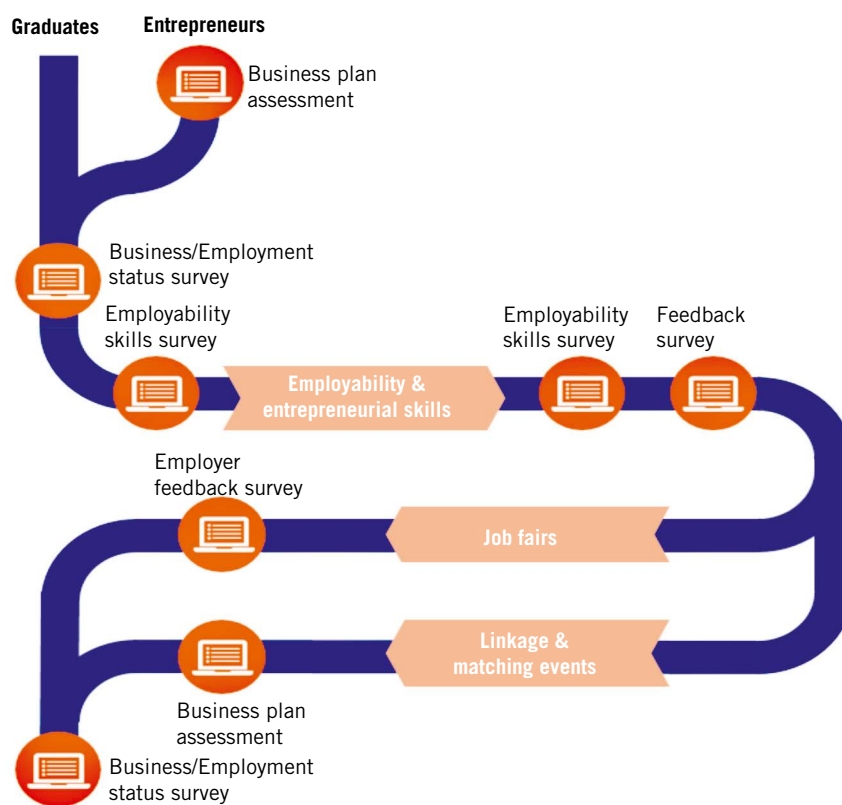
Instrument	Main indicators	Descriptions
Self-evaluation – soft skills form	% F/M young people who report improvement in at least five entrepreneurial skills and two management skills	Quantitative data that measure the change in knowledge of soft skills, recorded at baseline, endline and at intervals in between. Data are entered online/on hard copy by the graduate/ entrepreneur. The graduate/ entrepreneur also evaluates each training session they attend. Data provide a subjective record of the value received and the quality of the information, trainer and facilities.
Employability skills survey	% F/M young people who report improvement in at least five entrepreneurial skills and two management skills	Quantitative data that measure the change in knowledge of soft skills, recorded at baseline, endline and at intervals in between. Data are entered online by the graduate/entrepreneur.
Event satisfaction for employers	% employers satisfied with the job fairs organized by the Maharat Programme.	Completed by the employer immediately after the job fair. A subjective record of the value received and the facilities.
Employer feedback	% F/M Maharat graduates showing excellent use of soft and technical skills in the workplace	Completed by the employer both one month and six months into employment to measure the skills of the graduates in the workplace. Can also be completed by programme staff during field visits or phone calls.
Attendance sheets	Number of events of each type delivered to each beneficiary and the number of attendees	Completed by the facilitator, trainer or M&E officer.

Data management

With the new results measurement system being implemented using an online database application, the employability skills survey completed by programme beneficiaries can now be easily distributed, received and collated, thus reducing the administrative burden on staff. Without the digital system, these ‘before’ and ‘after’ skills surveys could not be carried out consistently enough to provide meaningful results and conclusions.

The chosen platform, goProve (www.goprove.org), provides online data collection for all instruments, management of the data and analysis of results. The employability skills survey and feedback survey are sent to the beneficiaries by email. Once the surveys have been completed, the data are linked to each beneficiary and event. Furthermore, this platform allows for full disaggregation and cross-compilation of beneficiary and instrument data based on gender, age, educational attainment, region and subject. A key strength of designing the M&E system using this platform is the ability to accommodate different beneficiary needs (such as where the data collection instruments have to be used offline) and for the M&E team to collect data directly from beneficiaries using tablets.

FIGURE 2. Overview of the data collection workflow of the M&E system



The system allows the M&E officer to send email invitations to all event attendees to ask them to complete a survey form. The email contains a unique URL (Uniform Resource Locator) which identifies the required form and beneficiary, so that the resulting data are linked to the correct person, event and analysis.

While data collection with this system can be immediate, some staff members' lack of trust in an electronic system meant that they were reluctant to use it. In fact, paper forms continued to be used until staff felt that the system could be trusted to collect the data they required. Once this had happened, considerable amounts of staff time were saved and meant more focus could be placed on further implementation of the system.

Achieving results

BDC's digital M&E system is not only saving significant time in terms of data collection and management, but is also building a comprehensive database of information that can be analysed over several years of the programme.

As BDC is in the middle of a long-term programme, endline analysis has not yet been carried out. However, data from more than 440 online surveys have been collated since the system was launched, with a rate of response to online surveys of above 95 per cent for all beneficiaries across all survey requests. These data show, for instance, that 39 per cent of beneficiaries in the soft and technical skills training were female, compared with 51 per cent of beneficiaries in the entrepreneurial skills training (see figure 3). This proves that BDC is close to reaching its goal that at least 50 per cent of those trained should be women. The female participants are found to score as well as their male peers on outcome indicators: regardless of gender, about 80 per cent of those joining soft and technical skills training achieved a test

score of at least 70 per cent, and about 33 per cent reported an increase in income compared with the baseline survey at the beginning of the programme. An impressive 80 per cent of female participants eventually landed a full-time paid job. About 45 per cent of both men and women who participated in entrepreneurial skills training achieved a score of at least 70 per cent in the business plan presentation.

FIGURE 3. Outcomes of skills training courses

FIGURE 3A. Soft and technical skills training

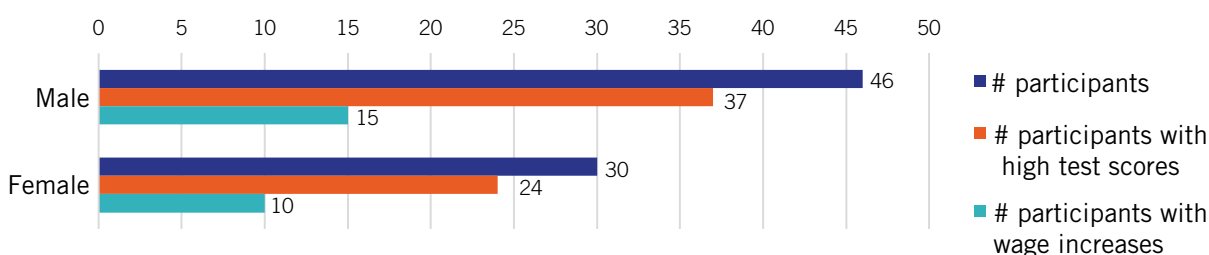
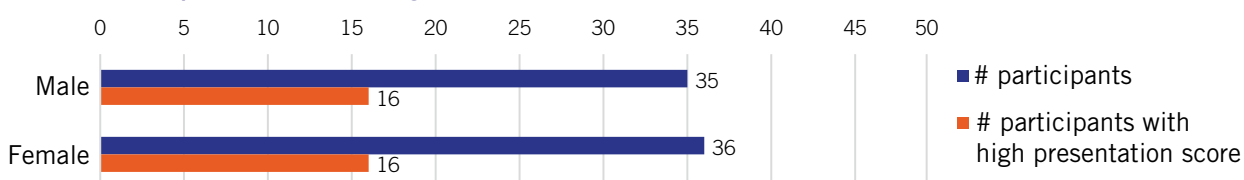


FIGURE 3B. Entrepreneurial skills training



In addition, analysis of the information from the training feedback forms and employability skills surveys has provided useful insights into the progress BDC is making. For instance, the data showed that over 60 per cent of beneficiaries said they had made a significant positive change (scoring two or more points on the Likert Scale) in the self-administered employability skills surveys. Additionally, utilizing the disaggregation features showed a difference in how male and female beneficiaries learned about the Maharat programme, with females being twice as likely as males to find such programmes through social media. Incorporating data related to progress into a programme’s implementation cycle is one of the main uses of a sound M&E system, and BDC is now able to achieve that.

Lessons learned

- **Power of technology:** At an operational level, a fully running digital M&E system has considerably improved the quality and efficiency of BDC’s work. However, this system would have been even better facilitated with access to electronic devices (such as tablets) at the beginning of the shift from paper to digital forms, in order to reduce the amount of manual data entry during the initial phase.

Stakeholder buy-in: Introducing comprehensive changes to existing data collection and monitoring systems is not only a technical and financial challenge, but is also a matter of getting the relevant stakeholders on board. The M&E team, as well as all programme leaders, need to believe that the effort of implementing and adopting new ways of working will be worth it. The additional work, training, new processes, systems and survey forms may be considered intimidating in the early stages, but perseverance will build meaningful data sets which can be analysed to identify required programme changes and provide evidence that the programmes are generating the expected outcomes and impacts.

- **Human resources and capacity development:** A data management officer, or at least long-term volunteers, needs to be trained in data entry to ensure that information is available regularly and not provided in a rush when needed for reporting purposes. If the latter option is chosen, the same volunteers need to be available throughout the task. They also need to be thoroughly trained and their work regularly checked for quality purposes.

Next steps

While the capacity development activities will continue, BDC aims to better visualize and present its statistical findings on the progress of its programmes. This will be useful in order to present periodic results and trends to the team, to make informed decisions about the design of future programmes, and also to showcase the achievements of BDC's work publicly.

BDC will continue to expand the use of the digital M&E system, adding more instruments in order to shed light on needed improvements to programme components, such as training content that better suits the needs of all beneficiaries. In particular, a cloud-based tracking system is planned to conduct additional progress assessments of the students after they have graduated from the programme. By tracking the success of their businesses, BDC can identify additional development needs and adapt its programmes accordingly.

The Taqem (meaning “evaluation” in Arabic) Initiative: What Works in Youth Employment is a technical cooperation programme of the International Labour Organization.

This brief was produced in partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as part of an IFAD-financed project titled “Strengthening gender monitoring and evaluation in rural employment in the Near East and North Africa”. Through rigorous impact research, this capacity development and learning grant project aims to understand “what works” in the promoting of gender mainstreaming, with the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality in rural employment outcomes across the region.

“The lab”, a research and knowledge generation project on how to measure and maximize jobs while working in value chains and sectors, has provided support to the Taqem Community of Practice. The lab is implemented by the ILO with funding from the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs and adopts a market systems approach to decent work.



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