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## **Closing the Gap: The Introduction of Work Based Learning Schemes in Palestine**

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### **Abstract**

Palestine is affected by a prolonged military occupation, which has severe socio-economic effects on the population, in particular among youth. As a consequence unemployment is on the rise with figures above 40% in the Gaza Strip. Many young people even with a degree cannot find a job. Yet various labour market studies have indicated that employers complain that they cannot find employees with adequate competences to work in their companies and that youngsters with technical skills are in high demand in Palestine. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) should therefore be the best career choice for youngsters to acquire relevant skills to find a job and to provide the labour market with the skilled youth it needs.

In Reality, TVET is not seen as an attractive option by most young people in Palestine and the existing TVET institutes are not capable to train sufficient youth with skills relevant for the labour market. The absence of structural cooperation with the private sector at the policy level as well as in the training programmes results in a growing skills miss-match with the labour market and impedes TVET reaching its high potential. To tackle this paradox and to reduce (youth) unemployment in Palestine, the Belgian Development Agency (BTC) launched a pilot programme introducing work-based learning (WBL) schemes supporting private-public partnerships in TVET.

The article focuses on presenting work-based learning in Palestine as a case study for implementing similar schemes in other settings. It describes the different preparatory steps and the roll-out of the WBL in Palestine by BTC as well as the first preliminary results on the employment opportunities for the graduates. It further focusses on the constraints at the institutional and practical level and identifies best practices that can work amidst adversity.

**Key Words:** *TVET, Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), Work-based Learning, BTC*

### **1 Introduction: Training for unemployment? A growing skills mismatch**

Palestine is determined by its long-term occupation by Israel confining the inhabitants to a limited territory impeding normal development. These imposed restrictions have a strong negative impact on the economy and private sector development. They considerably weakened the Palestinian economic competitiveness and pushed private investment levels to amongst the lowest in the world. Given the high population growth in Palestine, this results in

a near stagnation in per capita incomes. The crippled economy is no longer able to create enough jobs and as a direct consequence unemployment is among the highest in the world (World Bank 2016; ILO 2015). Official unemployment reached 41.7% in the Gaza Strip compared to 18.2% in the West Bank (PCBS 2017).

Unemployment is particularly dramatic among youth, reaching 40% for over a decade (PCBS 2016). Moreover, there is a strong gender dimension in youth unemployment: The gender-based gap in the employment-to-population ratio is very large with young men almost seven times more likely to be employed than young women (Sadeq 2016, 19).

However, these results have to be treated with some caution. Over half of the businesses in Palestine are part of the informal economy with less than 25% of the employees benefitting from a written contractual agreement: 'Informal employment is the norm for virtually every young employed person in the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPT)' (Sadeq 2016, 4). The majority of employed youth (57.4%) held an informal job in the formal sector while 37.6% worked in the informal sector. Only 5.1% of employed youth were in formal employment (BTC 2017, 15).

Young people are the most vulnerable to economic difficulties due to their lack of skills and experience, with young women being especially disadvantaged, due to cultural norms and traditions related to the patriarchal society which reduce dramatically their choice of profession and freedom of movement (Hilal 2009). Facilitating the transition from education to employment is therefore of utmost importance, in particular for women (ILO 2015, 12).

Occupation is not the only factor that has a negative impact on economic growth and employment. The Palestinian economy has additional shortcomings making it perform below its potential. One of them is the lack of technically skilled people for the labour market.

90% of the private sector in Palestine consists of family-owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which are mainly in need of workers with technical skills (Hilal 2013). This is not in line with the priorities of the educational system. The consequence is a growing mismatch between the skill needs of the labour market and the qualifications of the graduates. Many of them have academic degrees, mostly in humanities, which is in low demand on the labour market. As a consequence, graduates have great difficulties to find a job or remain unemployed. This is in particular the case for young women (PCBS 2016).

Notwithstanding these excellent job opportunities, TVET remains a second option for youngsters. Only a tiny fraction of the total student population attends formal TVET education and this while the private sector is in dire need of more and better skilled people with a TVET degree. About 3% of the youngsters opt for formal vocational education at secondary level (4.2% for males and 0.6% for females) (Ministry of Education 2016, 65). Adding those who are enrolled in technical education at college level and vocational training schemes (non-formal education), one reaches as much as 15% of the total youth population between 15 and 29, what is still considerably below the regional and international norm.

The reasons for this low number of enrolment can be found in a cultural tradition that respects intellectual competences over technical skills. Most parents in Palestine prefer to send their children to general education that prepares them for university or a tertiary education degree. As important is the currently poor quality of TVET. Curricula and equipment are outdated, teachers are not properly trained and school management doesn't have the necessary autonomy to create joint ventures with the private sector. As a result of this, companies lack trust and interest in both the TVET system and its graduates.

## 2 Reinventing the master-apprentice relationships

To tackle this paradox and to reduce youth unemployment, the Belgian Development Agency (BTC) decided to launch a programme to improve the quality and the labour market relevance of TVET in Palestine. The ECIB programme aims to reach this objective by introducing work-based learning (WBL) schemes in TVET.

Work-based learning is internationally defined as 'learning that occurs when people do real work. This work can be paid or unpaid, but it must be real work that leads to the production of real goods and services' (ETF 2014, 3). In most cases WBL is part of TVET and it hardly ever stand-alone, but is usually combined with classroom-based learning. WBL serves two main purposes: it improves the practical skills of TVET students and facilitates the transition from school to work for graduates. Also the private sector benefits since it is in its companies where the graduates will be hired as employees. Hence, the employers will save money and time if they can hire young people who are better trained in skills relevant for the labour market and have prior work experience.

Work-based learning or WBL is mostly used as an umbrella term to describe different types of what is more traditionally described as apprenticeships. In this case, two major types of WBL or apprenticeship depending on the legal status of the apprentice can be distinguished:

Table 1: **Formality of apprenticeships**

Informal apprenticeship	Formal apprenticeship
Apprentice is working without a legal or formal framework, mostly in informal businesses and without relation to TVET	Apprentice is working and protected by a legal and formal framework, with formal relation to TVET

*Informal* apprenticeship refers to the system in which a young learner (the apprentice) acquires the skills for a trade or craft in a micro- or small enterprise learning and working side by side with an experienced craftsman. The apprentice and the craftsman conclude a training agreement that is embedded in local norms and traditions of a society. Both share the costs of the training (ILO 2012, X).

In the case of *formal* apprenticeship, the in-company training is *complemented by classroom-based instruction*. Apprentice, master craftsman/employer and training provider conclude

a training agreement that is regulated by formal laws and acts. Costs of training are shared between apprentice, master craftsman/ employer *and the government* (ETF 2014, 18-25).

The concept and practice of work-based learning is not a novelty. It exists since many centuries and in many countries under the form of apprenticeships where an apprentice starts working at a young age to learn a trade from an expert or master craftsman. Once the initial on-the-job training is completed, the apprentice is promoted to the status of an assistant to further improve his/her competences to become a master craftsman and starts her or his own business including training apprentices (Smith & Brennan Kemmis 2013, 3). With the introduction of obligatory education and the sharp distinction between working and learning, the apprenticeship scheme was abandoned in many countries. The increased labour regulation further reduced the number of apprentices without officially being replaced by someone who can fill the gap. In the informal economy we can still find many apprentices worldwide.

This is precisely where the WBL programme of BTC comes in. It aims to replace the informal apprenticeship schemes by a new system that takes better into account the rights and obligations of apprentice and employer while respecting the labour law as well as the modern principles and practices of education and training.

### **3 Work-based learning practices in Palestine**

Before embarking on this formalization process, BTC conducted two studies to acquire a better insight in the current TVET system and the different forms of apprenticeships that exist in Palestine. The objective was to identify opportunities for a potential framework for upgrading these apprenticeship schemes, taking into account the local economic and cultural context to come to a workable system (Smith & Brennan Kemmis 2013, 4).

The inception study focussed on school-based apprenticeships in Palestine implemented by four institutes, two of whom were based on a GIZ project on apprenticeships in 2006, while the other two were implemented by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 2004 and 2009 (Gabršček et al., 2015). They can be considered as examples of formal apprenticeship schemes. School-based apprenticeship has worked well within the economic context in Palestine. It differed from the better-known company-based schemes implemented in Europe and other countries according to its set-up. Whereas in school-based apprenticeship the apprentice is a student and the apprenticeship program is organized by the TVET institutes, in company-based apprenticeship the apprentice is not a student and the apprenticeship is organized by the private sector.

Although private and public TVET institutes are currently training over ten thousand students annually in more than 70 different fields, the need for skilled workers remains high and the limited capacities of institutes cannot meet by far the market demand. According to a Labour Market Survey of 2013, 21% of the enterprises are suffering from a lack of qualified workers within the first three work levels (semi-skilled, skilled and craftsman level) in fields where training is either not provided or advanced technology is affecting the profession (Hilal

2013). A further increase of the demand for skilled labour can be expected in the coming years by 19% annually (up to 28% annually for females). This increase was clearly sector-specific, as some of the specializations were already provided through the official TVET programmes. Others were not yet covered, forcing the private sector to look for other options such as informal apprenticeships (Hilal 2013).

The table below summarizes the different types of apprenticeship schemes existing in Palestine, including the different characteristics of each type. All types occur with the exception of formal company-based apprenticeship. On the formal TVET side, school-based apprenticeship does exist but only in the 4 institutes mentioned above. In 2015, only 253 students graduated (193 males and 60 females) from these 4 institutes (BTC 2017, 19-20). A small number of other institutes provided long-term internships, while colleges and other TVET institutes provided traineeships and internships. The first job experience schemes, with matching fund to support temporary employment for graduates, were all project based (Gabršček et. al 2015, 10).

Table 2: **Work-based Learning characteristics and those existing in Palestine**

<b>WORK-BASED LEARNING SCHEMES in TVET</b>	<b>Wages</b>	<b>Legislative Frame work</b>	<b>Work- place based</b>	<b>Programme of learning</b>	<b>On-the-job training</b>	<b>Off-the-job training</b>	<b>Formal assessment</b>	<b>Recognized certification</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>In Palestine</b>
Traineeship	Maybe	-	√	-	Maybe	-	-	-	Variable	Colleges, TVET inst. etc.
Internship	Maybe	-	√	-	Maybe	-	-	-	Variable	UNWRA, YMCA
First job experience	Maybe	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	Variable	Welfare, EFE
Formal school-based apprenticeship	Maybe	-	√	√	√	√	√	√	Fixed	Hebron ISS, LWF, ES
Formal company-based apprenticeship	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	Fixed	-
Informal company-based apprenticeship	Pocket money or in kind	-	√	-	Maybe	-	-	-	Variable	Many companies

The predominance of the informal economy up to 60% of the labour force, the great demand for technically skilled people and the lack of school-based apprenticeship schemes in TVET until very recently makes that informal company-based apprenticeship at the contrary is widespread in Palestine (Hilal 2016).

Research shows that the system is effective in the sense that it responds to a real need and provides opportunities for both youth and businesses (Hilal 2016, 57). Most apprentices are coming from large families with income below the poverty line, what confirms the fact that informal apprenticeship is the skills training of last resort for vulnerable families. Most of them were male school drop-outs or in need of immediate income not able to wait until the

skills were gained in a TVET institution. However, many have progressed since and were able to remain employed or self-employed after their apprenticeship period (Hilal 2016, 48).

The informal apprenticeship schemes differ by region and are deeply connected to the individual's social environment, whether through friends, family networks or communities. As a result, rights are always reserved and people deal with each other with trust and integrity. Yet the system faces various contextual and structural challenges as well as major training and working environment deficits.

There are deficits with regard to the decent work agenda including unsafe working conditions, insufficient social protection in case of illness and strong gender imbalances. Informal apprenticeship is not clearly covered by law and mentors, as well as owners, apprentices and skilled workers have only a minimum understanding of existing legislation. In most cases there are only verbal agreements between the apprentice and mentor (Hilal 2016, 57). Despite the fact that training outcomes with regard to employment and self-employment are high, the quality of the training depends strongly on the quantity and quality of the work available in the workshops. In some cases, mentors cooperated with others to cover the defects in acquiring the necessary skills.

We can conclude that although formal in-company apprenticeship does not exist in Palestine, the potential is high, given the awareness of enterprise owners and managers, but under the condition that a system is developed at the national level (Gabršček et al. 2015, 50). It is important therefore to gain first a better understanding of TVET system as a whole.

#### **4 Fragmentation of the TVET system in Palestine**

TVET is provided by various structures in Palestine: The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), and - typically for Palestine - by the NGO-VET League and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). There is a large number of private providers of TVET, both for profit and non-profit. The entire system is supervised by the MoEHE and the MoL.

A Cabinet decision of 2004 installed a Higher Council of TVET chaired by both ministries on a rotating basis consisting of representatives from the Ministries of Social Affairs, Finance, Planning, Tourism and Antiquities, UNRWA, the Chambers of Commerce, the Federation, trade unions, NGOs and local experts. This Higher Council is responsible for defining the national policies for TVET and to monitor the performance of the subsector. The (revised) National TVET Strategy developed in 2010 stresses the need for improving the quality and relevance of TVET and indicated the importance of TVET-Labour Market relations.

In reality, most of the decisions existed only on paper for nearly 10 years and the whole TVET structure in Palestine remained highly fragmented. In 2015, however, the Higher Council of TVET was activated and preparations started for the creation of a Development

Center that would be responsible as the technical arm of the Steering Committee for the development of new legislation, strategies, policies, action plan and the overall coordination between the different TVET departments and institutes (BTC 2017, 8).

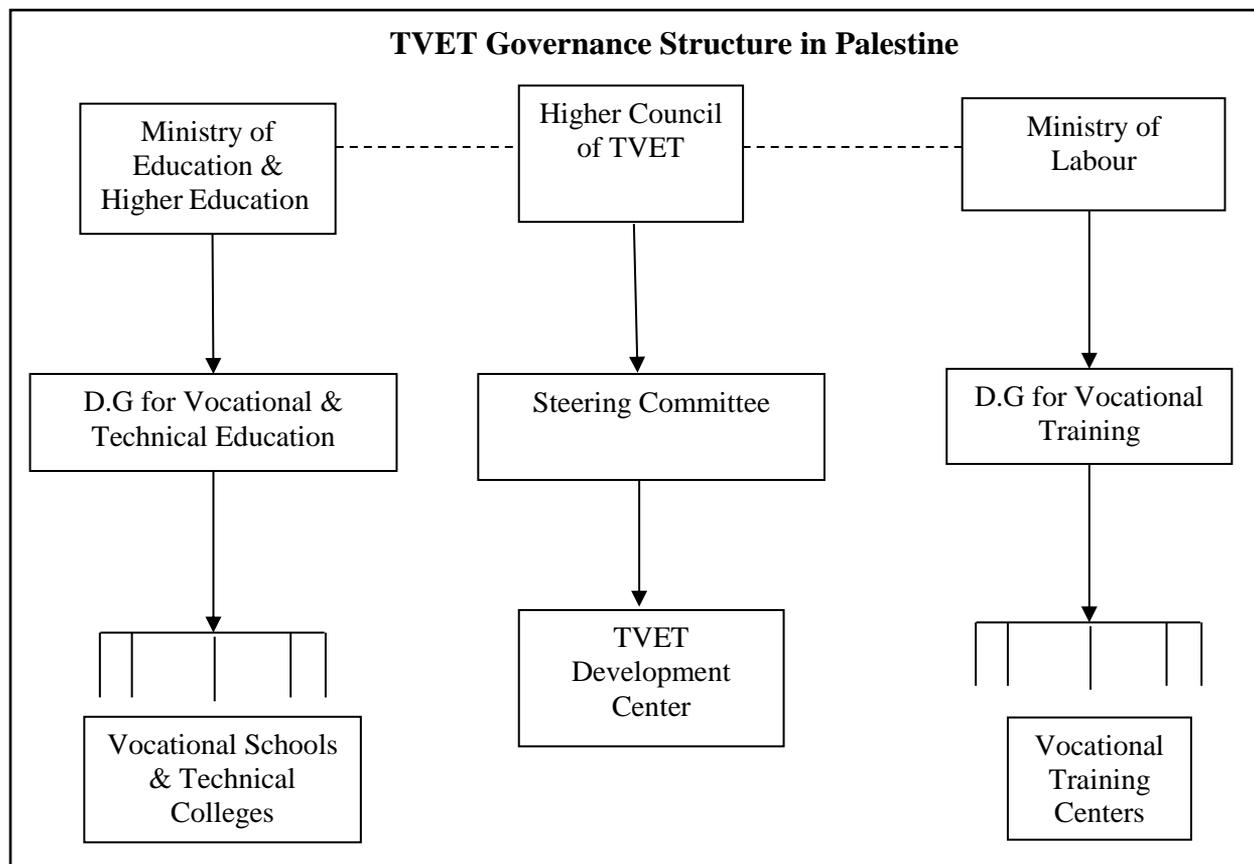


Figure 1: Diagram of the TVET governance structure in Palestine as defined by a 2004 Cabinet decision

## 5 Closing the skills gap: Launching of the WBL pilot

To face the large number of challenges in formalising apprenticeship schemes and developing a national apprenticeship system, BTC decided to operate with the ECIB programme at three levels simultaneously (Gabršček et al. 2015, 5):

- Strategic level: Creation of a TVET coordination structure including legislation on WBL at the policy level supporting WBL schemes in TVET
- Operation level: Support and monitor the implementation of improved WBL schemes on a wider scale which are better integrated in the TVET governance structure
- Individual Level: Facilitate the access of economically and socially disadvantaged youth to work based learning through a pro-gender, pro-poor scholarship scheme

With no real tradition of school-based apprenticeship programmes, BTC preferred to start with a small pilot of 10 WBL initiatives joining up 10 TVET institutes with 30 private sector companies and over 200 students before embarking on a nationwide programme. The pilot

was not sector or level specific but encompassed different levels and types of TVET institutes going from non-formal training in the Vocational Training Centers, over official vocational education in the secondary schools up to technical education in the colleges on the tertiary level. Private non-profit as well as public institutes were selected. The maximal duration of each initiative was one year and each institute received a maximum of 10.000 Euros for the extra costs related to the pilot. The private sector partners could receive up to 30% from this budget to cover expenses such as insurances, uniforms, tools and equipment, adaptations of the workplace, etc. A matching pro-gender and pro-poor scholarship programme was set-up to facilitate the access of vulnerable and disadvantaged youth with a specific focus on supporting young women to enrol in the WBL pilot.

## **6 Turning the tide - First results indicate a high potential for WBL to tackle youth unemployment in Palestine**

To measure the results of the pilot and to know how many of the graduates of the WBL pilot found a job or were self-employed, a tracer study was conducted at the end of 2016, one year after the graduation of the participants (BTC 2017, 22).

To make sure that the data of the tracer study reflect the reality on the ground, a specific methodology was developed by the M&E team of the ECIB programme. In the first instance, the TVET institutes were requested to provide detailed information on the WBL graduates. A questionnaire was developed to this end at the beginning of the programme containing a large number of questions about the personnel situation of the students: identification, social and educational background, motivation of enrolment, detailed training path during the WBL programme, etc. Approximately a year later, the TVET institutes had to fill in the second part of the questionnaire related to the current situation of the student after graduation: (self)-employed in relation or not to the vocation, unemployed or in further education, position in the company, field of work, salary range, etc. As it was not advisable to rely solely on the data provided by the TVET institutes, in addition to the questionnaire, each individual graduate was contact by phone to check if the information was correct and complete. Nearly all graduates could be reached and confirmed in most cases the data of the TVET institutes.

The greatest challenge lies, however, in the fact the majority didn't have a formal contract with their employer or were not officially registered as self-employed. Given that most young people employed in Palestine work without a written contract, as mentioned earlier, we decided to consider the graduate as employed if (s)he received a minimal salary on a regular basis or gained income from her or his activities.

The results of the study were both striking and surprising. There was a steep increase in the number of TVET graduates that found a job after completing the WBL programme compared with those that followed a traditional TVET training. On average for the three levels combined (technical and vocational education and vocational training) there was an increase above 20% from 61% to 78%, meaning that nearly 80% of all the WBL graduates who

decided not to continue their studies found a job within one year after graduation. This can be seen as a remarkable outcome in a context of a youth unemployment rate of around 40%.

Looking more in detail at the figures separated by sex there are interesting findings on the difference of results for males and females:

Table 3: **Level of education according to gender**

<b>Level of education / Sex of graduates</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Technical Education graduates	82%	44%	68%
Vocational Education graduates	89%	_*	89%
Vocational Training graduates	89%	51%	77%
<b>Total of TVET graduates</b>	87%	56%	77%

\* There were no female vocational secondary school students who participated in the WBL pilot

Although this concerns only a relative small sample of 216 students of which 122 are male and 94 female, the contrast is striking enough to give a clear indication. Looking at the great disparity between the numbers for the females and males one can only conclude that far less young women than men found a job after graduation.

An explanation for these results can be found in the overall societal context in Palestine and the characteristics of the labour market as mentioned above. The participation of women in the (official) economy is among the lowest in the world, namely just above 16%: ‘Inactivity is the dominant economic activity status among young women. (...) The second most frequent reason for female youth to be inactive after education is family responsibilities or housework which represents 30% of all inactive young women’ (Sadeq 2016, 2, 30).

The fact that so few women are looking for a job makes it increasingly difficult for those women who are willing to work to find a job as they encounter many cultural and practical obstacles to enter the labour market. The specific focus on increasing the participation of women in the pilot had a positive impact on the employability and employment rate of female youth. At the same time it is evident that this measure by itself is by no means sufficient to change the whole gender setup of the labour market in Palestine. To alter this reality a more comprehensive strategy will be necessary.

A second outcome of the WBL pilot was the creation of local public-private partnerships (PPP) based on mutual benefits between the different stakeholders in the TVET subsector. There have been various initiatives to systemise the relationship between TVET institutes and private companies under the form of training of school-based institutes, the presence of private sector representatives in TVET national and regional structures, and through local support of the private sector to TVET institutes. With the WBL programme these private public partnerships became more institutionalised. The obligation to introduce a joint

proposal with one or more private companies to benefit from the WBL Fund encouraged the TVET institutes to engage themselves directly with the private sector. The latter understood fairly quickly the benefit of entering a WBL programme and in most cases offered a job to the students directly after completion of the apprenticeship.

The external evaluation of the WBL pilot concluded that ‘the project as a whole has been successful in increasing awareness of the TVET mission and role in education and the role played by apprenticeship to achieve that. Moreover, we found out this programme has helped strengthening the linkages among various partners such as TVET institutes and the business enterprises. The programme has helped increase students’ ability to transition to the world of work by acquainting them with the nature and requirements of the labour market. The project has increased access at both ends (i.e. students and businesses) to each other and allowed benefits and gains for both: a pool of candidates for businesses as well as creating opportunities for training and employment for apprentices’ (AEF 2015, 5). Also the potential for developing WBL as an integral part of the TVET system in Palestine and hence assuring the sustainability of the programme was seen as very high: ‘The evaluation team has observed that all the TVET institutes are enthusiastic and ready to repeat the apprenticeship experience. All the institutes are planning to roll-out the pilot for the same training specialisation or other trades and professions. Most of them are planning to design new training programmes using the WBL approach, based on the needs of the local labour market’ (AEF 2015, 18).

A third and probably most crucial outcome was the development of a strategic cooperation between the different stakeholders in the TVET subsector at policy level: Ministries, TVET providers, social partners, civil society and international actors and this at the national, regional and local level. Starting as a joint initiative of GIZ and BTC at the project level mid-2015 to offer a minimal institutional framework for the programmes of both organisations, the creation of a temporary multi-stakeholder Joint Management Structure has intensified the coordination and cooperation between the different stakeholders in the TVET subsector.

Less than a year after the creation of this structure, there was an important breakthrough in the re-activation of the Higher Council for TVET to prepare the ground for the development of the TVET Governance Structure in Palestine. The creation of the Development Center as the technical arm of the Higher Council is of particular importance for developing the necessary policies, systems and instruments to guarantee an efficient joint management of the TVET subsector. It is most likely that the Development Center will be operational by the end of 2017 (BTC 2017, 18).

The evaluation report concluded with a large number of positive outcomes and challenging factors related to the WBL pilot which can be summarized as follows (AEF 2015, 20):

**Table 4: Outcomes and Challenges of WBL Pilot in Palestine**

Positive Outcomes	Challenging Factors
High impact on employability of students: almost	A weak link between what is taught at the TVET

80% found a job instead of 60% in normal TVET	institute and practiced in company
Increased access of disadvantaged students thanks to scholarship fund	Lack of skills of trainers in TVET institutes
Well-equipped hosting firms offered real work experience	Lack of national policy and guidelines
Improved cooperation and coordination between TVET institutes and private sector companies	Lack of sufficient (non-)financial incentives
Availability of employment after the training	Social stigma around TVET causing students not to opt for this education or training
Strong support of labour unions, government, chambers, etc.	Gender in-equality in some vocations
Motivated students and vocational coaches	Lack of capacity building programme for coaches
	Lack of an effective certification programme

The large number of challenging factors that were encountered during the WBL pilot shows clearly that the three-layered integrated approach mentioned above is essential to tackle these challenges and obtain sustainable results on a systemic level.

## 7 Towards a national WBL scheme for Palestine

After this successful pilot, BTC decided to set up a full-fledged WBL Fund to support the development and roll out of WBL schemes on a national level with the objective of establishing an integrated system of demand-driven TVET that promotes WBL in Palestine. A total number of 73 WBL initiatives were successfully introduced by 44 TVET institutes in cooperation with over 200 companies. A pro-gender and pro-poor Scholarship Fund was linked to the WBL Fund.

Based on the recommendations of the evaluation report of the WBL pilot, the following measures were taken to assure the quality of the training in the TVET institutes and in the private companies (Optimum 2017):

- Orientation workshops were conducted for the directors of the TVET institutes and the managers of the companies to assure a common understanding of WBL, to define the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders and to enable them to prepare action, monitoring and evaluation plans. Social partners were engaged as important mediators in the entire process
- A consultancy firm was hired to follow-up the initiatives by putting in place an effective system of tailor-made coaching and monitoring of each individual institute and its private sector counterpart
- Trainings were organised for the trainers and counsellors in the TVET institutes to prepare them for the accompanying of the trainees before, during and after the WBL programme including an introduction to the tools and materials that were developed by ECIB (WBL manual, logbooks, etc.) in cooperation with the consultancy firm

- Master craftspersons' trainings were organised for the private sector mentors to prepare them for their role of accompanying the trainees during their in-company training. The training modules and material were developed in cooperation with the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurship Training *Syntra*
- A close monitoring system of all the initiatives by the management team of the ECIB programme was developed to detect problems in an early stage and propose corrective measures.

All these steps and measures were essential in integrating the know-how, the required skills and used tools within the TVET institutes and companies implementing the WBL.

The roll-out of the WBL Fund will increase more than tenth fold the current number of WBL students in Palestine. Over 40% of them are women what is considerably above the pre-set target. This is a remarkable result taking into account the low number of female students enrolled in TVET and is proof of the effective gender policy ECIB adopted (BTC 2017, 34).

A large number of TVET institutes and companies decided to continue with WBL after finalising the first round, using either the savings on their allocated budget or looking for alternative funding schemes in cooperation with the private sector. International organisations as GIZ and IRPAL will integrate WBL in some of their programmes from 2017 onwards or consider doing so in the future in case of the World Bank. This can be seen as clear evidence of the integration of work-based learning in the general TVET system in Palestine.

The development of a WBL strategy and legal framework on the national level on which the ECIB programme is currently working and the creation of a training fund or sectoral training funds co-financed by the private sector can assure the further institutionalisation of WBL.

## **8 Conclusions and Lessons learned: From institute to system change**

The introduction of work-based learning schemes in the TVET subsector in Palestine has proven to be a very successful approach to link education and training with employment and has substantially contributed to:

- A marked decrease in the existing mismatch between the subjects taught in the TVET institutes and the real skills and competences needed in the labour market
- A substitution of informal apprenticeship by work-based learning schemes offering better pedagogical support, legal protection (see the Decent Work Agenda of the International Labour Organisation) and an official recognition of skills (certificates)
- A significant increase in the employability of graduates and a clear improvement of the quality of TVET applying the WBL approach
- A firm commitment of the different ministries, private sector organisations and donor agencies to bring TVET under a joint multi-stakeholder private-public management structure that will contribute to the further institutionalisation of the cooperation between the public and private sector at the national, regional and local level

- A large increase in the number of female students enrolled in TVET and WBL schemes, including in non-traditional vocations
- The decision of the EU Member States in their joint strategy for Palestine (2017-2020) to support the integration of WBL schemes in at least 50% of the TVET institutes (EJS 2016, 96 & 124) and of other international actors to include WBL in their future programmes.

The success of the WBL programme of BTC was made possible by adopting a tailor-made approach that takes fully into account the existing fragile socio-economic and institutional context in Palestine.

The following crucial lessons were learned during the implementation of the WBL initiatives to assure the institutionalisation beyond the project or program level:

- All the different levels on the policy and institutional level were addressed to assure the long-term systemisation of the WBL initiatives. It is indeed essential that the partner institutions are fully involved right from the inception of the programme and that they actively contribute to the design, the actual launching, monitoring and, ideally, the financing of the programme, or at least contribute in kind to the operational costs of the projects: staff time, existing infrastructure, etc. Without the prior consent and buy-in of the main ministries, in our case the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) and the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the participating TVET institutes, it is very difficult to generate the necessary support for the programme
- The social partners should be equally fully engaged from the early start. The success of work-based learning is nearly entirely depending on the involvement of the social partners who take in principle the lead of the entire process. The private sector together with the labour unions, in Palestine *de facto* replaced by NGOs, have to define the terms and conditions of the work-based learning scheme and should therefore participate in all major decisions at the national as well as local level
- To assure subsequently the coordination between these many actors, it is essential to create a joint management structure at the programme level that unites all the stakeholders, including the main international actors to avoid duplication, contradictory approaches or overburdening of the partners and to come to a joint WBL strategy for the country. In a later stage, this ad hoc structure will be replaced by a permanent coordination structure at the national level
- Although work-based learning is rooted in an ancient tradition, it remains necessary to invest considerable effort in promoting WBL among the key stakeholders. Both the private sector and the TVET providers have to be convinced of the clear benefits that the schemes can offer them. The fact that ECIB offered direct financial incentives to the TVET institutes and the company owners, persuaded them to take part in the WBL programme. The matching pro-gender and pro-poor Scholarship Fund was the third component that was crucial in the rapid acceptance of WBL approach in Palestine as it lowered dramatically the threshold for disadvantaged students to participate in the

scheme and gave both institutes and companies a supplementary incentive to welcome these students

- An intensive coaching and monitoring programme for the TVET institutions and the private companies has to guarantee a clear understanding of the WBL approach and provide key staff with the necessary know-how, tools and skills to assure the quality of the in-company training
- It is highly recommendable to opt for a gradual implementation according to the figure below, starting with a pilot followed by the roll-out of a WBL Fund to give the stakeholders the opportunity to be aware of its benefits before taking the decision to integrate it in the national TVET programme.

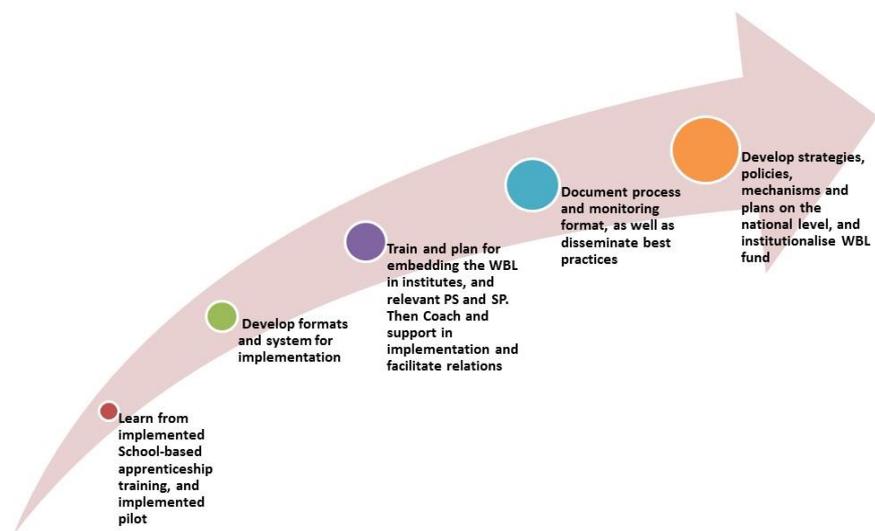


Figure 2: Bottom-up approach from institute to system change

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