

## The youth, work values, and challenges of the era

Working paper presented at Abha Cultural Meeting

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As the Secretary-General of the National Center for Youth Studies, it gives me pleasure on behalf of people responsible for the Center, which has been established recently with the approval of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, President of the Council of Ministers and President of the Council of Higher Education, to express our tremendous happiness and gratitude to His Royal Highness Prince Faysal bin Khaled bin Abdulaziz AL Saud, governor of Aseer and the organizers of this meeting, for choosing the topic of "The youth and future demands" as a slogan for this Abha summer meeting (1429). The choice of this important, sensitive topic at this time is nothing but evidence of the insightful vision that perceives in the youth its determination, confidence, and strong forward-looking attitude to participate effectively in the blessed growth operation in our dear country.

The billion and a half souls whose age ranges between 15 and 24 according to the 2007 estimation, which is referred to by the United Nations as "the youth", are the best educated generation throughout history. The Saudi youth, who represent today 29% of the Kingdom's population, constitutes a tremendous source of national growth. They are the best educated generation in the Kingdom, the most influential work force on job opportunities, the most eager of all other social categories to innovate and assimilate changes, and more capable of interacting and responding to the outcomes of education and technology.

As a follow-up of the precious lecture given by His Excellency Professor Adnan bin Mohamed Wazzen, Rector of University of Um Al-Qura, on the youth and work values, allow me to stop at some points of the most recent specialized

international report on the youth issued by the General Assembly of the United Nations in English and whose Arabic version has not yet appeared, which is titled “the world youth” (2007): the youth coming of age: Progress and challenges. The report includes information about and analysis of the situations of the youth in several fields especially regarding their participation in the job market and building the community. It also includes important suggestions to those setting up youth policies, interested in youth development and in increasing their societal contributions and resolving their problems. This has led the National Center for Youth Studies to study this report and adopt its findings as some of the inputs of youth futuristic planning.

First: The “world youth” (2007) report issued by the United Nations indicates that in 2005 more than half of the young laborers (56%) in the world were inhabitants of Asia, and that economic openness and exposure to foreign goods, services, and information categorically changed the life, values, and culture of many Asian youth.

Second: Globalization widened the gulf between poor and rich countries, and while many of the youth benefited from the increasing opportunities and industries that were brought to Asia, yet others remained in deprivation owing to inadequate education and poverty, thus benefiting less from information, goods, and services that have been made available with globalization.

Third: According to the “world youth” (2007) report, globalization improved opportunities for Asian youth to enjoy adequate education. A great deal of people deprived of educational services have benefited from the new learning options, including distance learning outside their own country. Several countries in the region depend on information and communication technology (ICT) to improve the opportunities of learning, whereby ICT-based distance education overcomes time and space restrictions. According to the report, in China there are 2,735 radio and television universities offering more than 18,000 classes. In 2001, these universities produced 174,300 new graduates and enrolled 216,000 new students.

The report indicates that young people pursuing their education through less traditional means are often better able to acquire knowledge and skills that will allow them to function effectively in a growing technology-driven economy.

Fourth: The impact of globalization on the education sector is also evident in the increased demand for skills in science and engineering. Many Asian educational systems have responded to this demand. In 2002, almost 650,000 science and engineering degrees were awarded in Asia, compared with approximately 357,000 in Europe and 100,000 in North America. The report also indicates that the rate of Asians awarded degrees in science and engineering in the United States rose, which entails the rise of the rate of competitiveness of the Asian youth in the global labor market.

Fifth: The report indicates that the global production systems require a workforce that is skilled, flexible, and adaptable to rapid change in the business environment. Significant progress is being made in building such a workforce, but action must be taken to reach those who remain outside the educational system since they will be unable to transition successfully into maturity and gainful employment, and participate effectively in the global economy.

Sixth: The report insists that vocational education provides important job-related skills that are typically not acquired through academic studies. In Asia, such education is particularly critical in the less developed countries, where significant numbers of youth have had no access to formal education or have dropped out of primary or secondary school. These young people need alternatives to prepare them for the workforce.

Seventh: The report believes that both the public and the private sectors have a vital role to play in vocational training, with particular attention given to increased investment in in-service practical experience. The report insists that governments should guard against investing in ad hoc crash-training courses aimed at addressing rising youth unemployment. These often represent stopgap solutions and typically

have no long-term impact. The report also insists that steps must be taken to ensure that disadvantaged youth have access to vocational and technical learning options.

Eighth: Although large numbers of young Asians are better prepared than ever before to enter the labor force, many are unable to find a job. Unemployment is a major problem among youth, as opportunities for securing decent work remain limited. Employers may discriminate against young workers for various reasons, the most obvious being that youth are often at entry levels and lack the experience and knowledge needed in the workplace.

Nine: The reports warns that although it would appear that levels of educational attainment, employment and remuneration are positively correlated, this is not always the case in Asia. Unemployment levels in the region tend to be higher among those with a secondary or higher education than among those who have not made it past the primary level. Low levels of technology use translate into weak demand for better educated youth, resulting in unemployment in skilled categories.

Tenth: The report indicates that because of the demands of the labor market and intense competition, many young people who are able to obtain employment in the formal economy end up doing menial work, are vulnerable to abuse and job insecurity, and may face various workplace risks owing to the lack of occupational safety. In China, for example, 38% of youth work without the protection of employment contracts and are therefore defenseless against job loss and exploitation.

Eleventh: The report indicates that the rate of females getting a job is lower than that of their male counterparts. The females' rate is 29% while that of males is 64%, which is, according to the report, the highest rate world-wide. The report also indicates that females get lower pay than males, but work more than males.

From the foregoing points of the “world youth” report (2007), challenges that face the youth across the world are clear with regard to participation in growth, habilitation for the labor market, and scientific, cultural, and economic challenges

that as soon as the youth control them other new challenges lead them to rapid thinking, acclimatization, and development of new personal skills.

Therefore, it is not strange that the work values change owing to renewed challenges and rapid global changes in the fields of economy and technology. In spite of this, the youth are capable to face up to these challenges and acclimatize rapidly to the era's transformations. The youth are the most influential work force on job opportunities, more eager than the other social categories to innovate and assimilate changes, and more capable of interacting and responding to the outcomes of education and technology. This is amenable to distinctive characteristics of the youth, most important of which are their continuous desire to look for novelty and adopt ideas to emphasize that they have reached an independent stage of their age.

When they provide the suitable directives and instructions and the opportunities that assist the youth in building their capabilities and contributing to growth through investment in their education, health, employment, and the activation of their sporting and entertainment, the societies consolidate the capabilities of the youth far in advance and assist them in realizing their contribution to growth. In order to maximally benefit from the youth in development, the educational, cultural, and social institutions of the society should play their role in setting up plans for a better future for the youth, cooperate with specialized centers such as the National Center for Youth Studies to scientifically study their current and futuristic issues and problems.

In sum, this is a sincere invitation for the educational, cultural, and social institutions of the community in the Kingdom to set up plans for a better future for the youth, scientifically study their current and futuristic issues and problems, and remove the barriers that thwart their effective participation in the blessed growth operation in our dear nation.

It gives me great pleasure to embalm my talk with a beautiful saying and a parental directive by His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz, May Allah Preserve Him and Bestow Health on Him, when he said: "Growth in its

quantitative and qualitative dimensions relies on the nation's capabilities. The most invaluable property of the nation is its human wealth, and the youth are the future of this nation. Upon them growth relies and through them we look forward to the future in order to position our country in the rank it deserves among the advanced nations of the world."

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