MENA Regional Financial Management Training Center: Strategy and Framework: An Introductory Note

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This note aims to briefly elaborate on the framework and mission of the newly MENA Regional Financial Management Training Center to serve ministries of finance (MOFs) and their affiliate organizations within the Arab world develop high quality specialized technical cadre. The center will constitute one of the main outcomes of the esteemed joint Arab-OECD-UNDP initiative known as "Good Governance for Development in Arab Countries" (GfD). Given its institutional nature, the Center will continue to serve Arab MOFs after the GfD initiative is concluded in 2008. This note, besides the Feasibility Assessment paper prepared by OECD, provide an overview regarding this project.

1. Mission

- The Center's ultimate goal is to help ministries of finance in the Arab world (MOFs) develop well trained highly qualified critical masses capable to carry and spread the swiftly ongoing reforms in their home institutions through vertical development of such staff. To achieve its mission, the Center will provide high quality interrelated set of programs, mostly based on problem solving techniques to help develop such cadre. MOFs will however bare the responsibility of selecting their attendees to such programs which may last for few days to two years[1].

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[1] Long term courses will be distance self-learning ones with collaboration of globally recognized institutions such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance And Accountancy in the UK or similar organizations or universities. At some point such training may turn a prerequisite for assuming mid to high-level positions in MOFs.

Programs would particularly cover specialized areas related to budget formulation and execution, cash management, debt management, certified public accountants and auditors, direct and indirect taxation, management of public-private partnership schemes, and other managerial skills. The Center will also seek to provide internationally certified programs; all of which are usually beyond the mission and capacity of the vast majority of the present domestic training centers in the Arab countries.

Beside its standard programs, the Center would provide demand driven courses to help member countries fulfill particular skill development needs. Those courses will however require a case-by-case special arrangements.

In this regard, the Center will draw on the invaluable technical resources available at other international and regional organizations such as the OECD, IMF, World Bank, Arab Monetary Fund, Joint Vienna Institute, and others, beside assistance from the well recognized domestic institutions available in most OECD countries to develop its programs, curriculums, training trainers, tuition, certification...etc. It will also get in collaboration with other similar institutions such as the successfully developed "Center of Excellence in Finance" (CEF) based in Ljubljana, and other similar centers[2]. During early phases, the Center should make use of the readily available successful programs and curriculums developed by similar specialized institutions. Some institutions have already offered to provide the Center with materials and training as an in-kind contribution to the Center. At a latter stage, more tailored programs for member countries would be important to develop.

In addition, the center will also play an essential role as a forum for budget and/or senior tax officials within MOFs which encourages dialogue and exchange of experiences amongst the Arab countries. This forum will be the equivalent to the well known OECD Senior Budget Officials (SBO) arrangement. In this regard, the Center might organize/coordinate and host regular meetings for senior budget and/or tax officials in the Arab world.

[2] Discussions with the CEF director on the exchange of know how, scholarships, and materials were took place in several occasions.

2. Policy

The center will be designated to provide high quality practical training covering areas, and using techniques, that are unlikely available or provided in the domestic centers of many Arab countries. It is to provide equal opportunity of accession to its programs and materials to all its members.

3. Location

The center will be based in Cairo, whereas it may arrange some events at the domestic centers located in any of its member countries; conditional on the availability of required infrastructure. In this regard, during the first round of Work Group III meeting held in Cairo in October 2004, Egypt's Minister of Finance Dr. Youssef Boutros Ghali offered to devote the premises and facilities of a Cairo based Sales Tax Training Center for such purpose. The abovementioned center is a well equipped one, with abounded lecture rooms, computer labs, accommodation facilities, and a restaurant.

4. Funding and Training Costs

The Center will be financed though budgets allocated by Arab and OECD donor countries, financial and in-kind contributions and sponsorships made by participating international organizations, and a symbolic annual subscription by its member countries. It may also receive financial and in-kind donations from the private sector to finance its training activates.

In the meantime, the center will not charge its members for tuition fees or materials costs. Normally, MOFs in member countries would cover travel and accommodation costs, incidental expenses, and living allowances for its participants. However, in some incidents international or regional organizations may finance such costs though bilateral arrangements with the member country, or through co-sponsoring some programs at the center with allocated budgets for such non-tuition related expenses.