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Executive Summary

The Arab Education Forum (AEF) initiated the idea of a Youth Mobility Fund in February 2005 following research on youth initiatives in Palestine and Egypt, several years of working with youth in the Arab world, and a meeting that brought together 30 young people from 10 Arab countries in Amman – Jordan. This mobility fund was later named “Safar” or travel in Arabic. The Safar Fund is designed as a mechanism for young people from the Arab World who are involved in a community initiative to search for a learning opportunity in another Arab country. This learning opportunity could take the form of an event (conference, meeting, training workshop) or *tazawor* (visiting another group, individual or NGO involved in a similar initiative, summer camps where people exchange experiences inter-generationally, etc...) or *tajawor* (apprenticeship). Such a mechanism, offering the opportunity of a travel grant on the basis of a personal initiative, did not previously exist on a regional level. It was thought that such a fund would be easy to manage with a rapid turnover of grants for visits and apprenticeships.

A founding committee for Safar was created out of the February meeting which started e-discussions on the project to develop an initial draft which was finalized in the Founding Committee (FC) meeting organized in July 2005 by AEF. In the meantime, Ford Foundation had approved a two-year grant for this project once it is established. In the Founding Committee meeting, nine members were nominated to form an Administrative Committee (AC) to be the main decision-making body, in particular concerning the allocation of grants. The project officially began on 1 October, 2005 and a team was hired consisting of the Regional Coordinator (RC), an administrative assistant, both of them supported by additional AEF administrative staff on a part-time basis.

The project received USD 350,000 from the Ford Foundation, through a sister youth development project called Naseej, managed by Save the Children, because, at the time, AEF was not yet registered officially. All these stakeholders were involved in this assessment by the evaluation team through individual and group interviews. Additionally, a review of key documents was carried out. The lead consultant attended Safar Fund fourth Regional Meeting. As a climax to this evaluation process, the evaluation team proposed a series of exercises to the AC in order to debate the initial outcomes of the evaluation in a participatory fashion and as part of the ongoing reflection and learning process so embedded in AEF’s approach.

The organisation of this report reflects the fluid critical thinking process of Safar. Part 1 provides information on the evaluation objectives and its methodology. Part 2 summarizes the feedback from key constituents and information gathered from the document review, as far as expectations, achievements and challenges are concerned. Part 3 outlines the key issues and challenges identified by the evaluation team which fed the debate with the AC. Part 4 summarizes the content of this debate. Part 5 offers concluding remarks from the evaluation team.

AEF took the initiative of this evaluation. Although internally motivated, AEF is keen to

show its partners the processes of evolution and adaptation that have taken place over the past two years in order to share objective results and future challenges with them. Indeed, the past two years have been rich with successes; at the same time several shortcomings have to be addressed to consolidate and further strengthen the Fund in the future.

The key factors of success lie with the strength of the concept itself, its innovative approach to learning, the AEF leadership in guaranteeing a vision and a philosophy throughout the piloting phase of the Safar project all along and the AC's remarkable dedication to the process and constant availability, as detailed below:

Key factors of success

The concept

- the strength of the concept itself
- the project responds to a clear need / demand
- the regional focus on the Arab World

Approaches and ways of working

- the project represents a new and innovative approach
- the project's beginning was an open, consultative process with a wide range of participants and without a pre-determined shape (whether by funder or host organisation)
- the project's development was organic and built on personal experience
- the spirit of the "learning" process characterises the process of project development as well as project activities so youth participate in all levels of activity from planning to implementation to evaluation and decision-making and planning again
- the development of Safar vision emerged from a dynamic and ongoing process of action and reflection
- the diversity – of backgrounds, origins, experiences, ages / generations and areas of interest / activity – which characterise the structure, process and activities; no one country, organisation, group or individual dominated the process
- the youth focus and age limits on grants encourage organisations/groups to send younger members
- if you reach them, working with youth "uncorrupted" by the development industry seems to be easier than working with youth already "formatted" (but the former are harder to reach)
- face-to-face, two-way encounters amongst young people and between young people and the Safar team, particularly through regional encounters are fundamental to the process
- commitment to recognising alternative role models, initiatives and ways of learning
- transparency and clarity in the grant and participant selection processes

AEF

- the dedication of project staff, their follow-up and support in application process
- AEF's human approach -- caring, flexibility and responsiveness;
- AEF history / track record in region and way of working
- AEF's role in safeguarding/ protecting vision and concept – what variables can be adapted/changed and what need to test over longer period (e.g. Arab World only, age range, open-ended learning process) v. variables which are flexible (quotas, costs covered, ways we work with institutions)
- AEF's approach to ongoing process of learning from and responding to experiences & mistakes
- spirit of support and flexibility between project staff and AEF more generally
- AEF commitment to addressing problems, confronting and talking about it without fear within AC
- AEF willingness to take a position based on principle and explain why
- the application process is quick and straightforward
- the speedy response and support provided to applicants in developing application including clarifying objectives of trip, providing information regarding potential hosts and contacts
- the rewards and inspiration of being part of Safar overshadow the intensity and heavy workload

- shared belief between AEF and AC in the ideas and principles fundamental to Safar and commitment to adopting these in how Safar works and not just what it does
- development of clear, shared vision between AEF and AC and increasingly embraced by partner organisations and youth

Administrative Committee

- AC engagement in regional meetings – fuel to keep going, building continuity in dialogue across region; informs and inspires AC meeting conceptually and also provides reality check
- the AC's participation in decision making including selection process
- AC support for grantees in their countries and outreach
- involvement of younger people in AC
- high level of engagement with and support of AC members for project
- the ability to take tough decisions collectively
- the building of confidence, trust and experience within the group
- "we represent no one but ourselves "

Partner organisations

the increasingly important role of partner organisations in outreach for Safar and in encouraging young people to apply for mobility grants.

However, this evaluation suggests that after nearly two years of operation, a number of issues must be addressed -both programmatic and organisational- to ensure the continued success of the project. AEF and the AC were invited to revisit a number of questions such as:

- ***What do the first two years of experience mean for Safar Fund's long-term objectives and the key results it believes it can reach over the coming 3-5 years?***
- ***Who is Safar Fund seeking to engage with?***
- ***Does Safar need to keep doing what it is doing but get better at it, or does it need to do it differently? Where and How?***
- ***Does Safar Fund want to expand its outreach?***
- ***How can outcomes be better shown to encourage further support for Safar's vision and "movement"?***
- ***Are the roles of all bodies clear (internally and externally) and appropriate? Should they be revised?***
- ***What resources does Safar need to realise its aspirations?***

Based on the discussions that arose from these questions, AEF and the AC agreed on a number of decisions, described in the full report, which will guide the planning and implementation of Safar activities in the coming period. They devised a strategy for the next two years with the following objectives: make the culture of initiative visible, increase the diversity, decrease the gap between expectations and reality and share more widely the decision-making power. In typical Safar style, the creation

of a new body in the Safar structure will be tested for the next two years, called “As-haab Safar” (meaning both friends and owners) so that the circle of decision-makers will widen and eventually allow for one person per Arab country to be represented. It is proposed that As-haab Safar will select the new AC, with at least 3 members changing every two years.

As far as the evaluation team is concerned, we found two key shortcomings, one external and one internal, which are critical to Safar in the coming phase:

1. Whatever the successes, AEF has not managed to effectively convey the significant impact of what has been happening. AEF has to get better at showing results to help those who support it; it needs to better capture what difference Safar makes to the youth it is reaching. The challenge will be to set criteria on how to measure the success of “moving” youth – supporting youth initiative(s) and learning.
2. The AEF should focus on the professional development of staff involved in Safar over the coming two years. In the past two years, AEF has focused on the building process of Safar and less on building a team able to deal with complex logistics, timely reporting, financial management, realistic planning, constant database and website development and ever growing event planning. With basic processes and mechanisms now successfully in place and a growing store of successful experiences in facilitating youth initiative and youth-led learning, AEF should now focus on strengthening both core and specialised competencies of its staff. Indeed, the route AEF has chosen to take is not the easy one. Emphasizing processes, pushing each actor to be responsible for his/her own learning and opening spaces for learning “journeys” requires even more professionalism than a more traditional approach.

The arrival of the new Regional Coordinator for Safar adds to the confidence that the evaluation team has developed over the course of the evaluation, that AEF and the AC have managed to develop sound foundations for the Safar Fund to continue to strengthen its efforts in support of “a culture of initiative” among Arab youth by providing space and resources for creative learning opportunities.

The evaluation team believes that the Safar project would greatly benefit from a no-cost extension of three months, i.e. until the end of December 2007. The approach to learning, integral to the development of the Safar project, has taken more time than had originally been expected. After witnessing the quality of the discussion process between the main decision-makers, followed by their capacity to make appropriate decisions, the evaluation team feels confident that AEF and the AC have all the elements in their hands to present to Naseej a credible revised proposal for this extended period with the aim of consolidating progress to date and meeting targeted outcomes for the pilot phase, as well as finalize plans for a second phase of activities for Naseej and/or other funders within the coming weeks.

The evaluation team was impressed by the maturity shown by AEF and the AC in anticipating challenges inherent to participatory processes which have defeated more than

one organization. The team is convinced of the added value that Safar is providing to developmental opportunities for Arab youth. The team also fully supports the direction that AEF has adopted -- trusting the individual and the process which puts each and every young person in the position of initiative and responsibility.

The evaluation team looks forward to watching the ongoing development and "co-motion" of Safar Fund, believing it will continue to be a critical space and resource for young people in the region for many years to come. Given the experiences of Safar's first two years and the clear strengths the project has gained by its commitment to the dynamic process of experimentation, reflection and action (learning praxis), the team recommends that funders interested in less traditional approaches to youth development continue to allow some space for the Safar team to test "detours" in their learning journey, while at the same time noting that this should be done with professionalism, responsibility and transparency.

The road is still long and as Reid Cooper wrote it in one of his poems:¹ "Even Ibn Battuta, if here, would agree that detours sometimes reveal just where you long to be".

¹ "Advice to an adventurer"

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Evaluation objectives

This evaluation was formative in nature and designed principally to encourage internal reflection on the general performance of the Arab Education Forum's Safar project to date. Emphasis was given to the overall strategic approaches and impact of the project within local contexts rather than specific activity level outputs. It is hoped that the results of the assessment process will inform the continued development and refinement of strategic directions and work plans for Safar going forward.

The evaluation terms of reference identified three key issues for exploration:

1. Test basic assumptions with which we began when the Fund was first established;
2. Examine extent to which processes, mechanisms and structures adopted are in line with Fund's vision and contribute to realisation of its objectives; and
3. Identify specific adaptations, additions, changes related to vision and objectives, processes, mechanisms and structures that might strengthen the Fund's work going forward

1.2 Methodology

The assessment was designed as a learning exercise for AEF and for Safar's Administrative Committee (AC).² The assessment was carried out in June/July 2007 and involved the following key stakeholders or project constituency groups: AEF management and project staff, members of the project's founding and administrative committees, recipients of the mobility fund grants, participants to Safar's regional meetings and selected representatives of Naseej/SCF which served as the institutional host during Safar's inception and has been the sole source of Safar funding during its first two years.³

Generally, discussions with constituent were framed around five areas of exploration:

- reflections on expectations of Safar (initial, changes over time, extent to which expectations were met)
- reflections on key achievements / shortcomings (success factors, barriers/obstacles)
- reflections on the future
- reflections on relationship to Safar (vis a vis constituent group to which informant belonged)

² The AC is composed of nine members, from eight countries, who were selected in a meeting of the Founding Committee in July 2005. A description of the role of the AC as originally envisioned is provided in AEF's documentation of that meeting. (See Annex 3.)

³ In addition, AEF's regional director contributed directly to the Safar project as her time in overseeing the project, like all of her work at AEF, is undertaken on a voluntary basis

(See Annex 1 for full Terms of Reference.)

The assessment methodology is based on the premise that all informants – staff, beneficiaries/constituencies, and the consultants – are subjective. Emphasis is therefore not given to achieving an elusive neutrality by taking the project team out of the equation. Instead, the assessment seeks to capture as fully as possible the full range of subjectivities and reflect these back to Safar's team in order to facilitate a dynamic process of reflection and interactive learning in which staff and their constituencies are actively engaged. Accordingly, the evaluation team itself was intentionally formed to embrace both insider/outsider views: the consultant team consisted of two external consultants and the newly appointed project coordinator. The lead consultant is familiar with the Safar project's inception as she previously worked as a programme officer for the Ford Foundation's Cairo Office and was thus engaged in the initial discussions and negotiations regarding Ford's support for the project. The second consultant, who looked particularly at organisational issues related to Safar, did not have prior experience with the project but has considerable experience working with development NGOs in the Middle East region and beyond at both programme and management levels. The new project coordinator was engaged in the evaluation team to facilitate her orientation to the project and to ensure that AEF staff and affiliates could continue to learn from and build on the evaluation process beyond the short-term engagement of the consultants. (See Annex 2 for CVs of evaluation team members.)

The evaluation was based on a review of key project and organisational documents and a series of informal individual and group, observations during Safar's regional workshop in Jordan, 23-25 July, 2007. (See Annex 4 for full list of project documents reviewed.) The evaluation team then held a series of reflection sessions with AEF staff and the AC as part of the AC's regular meeting, held every six-months. The AC meeting, its fourth, was held from 26-28 July just after the regional meeting with most AC members also attending the regional meeting as well. As will become apparent in this report, an ongoing process of learning and evaluation between AEF and the AC has been an integral part of the Safar project. Thus, the AC meeting was a forum both for reflecting on the outcomes of this particular evaluation exercise and continuing the ongoing learning process embedded in Safar's approach to organising for and implementing activities.

1.3 Organisation of report

The organisation of this report reflects the fluid and ongoing nature of learning and evaluation in Safar. Part 2 provides a brief summary of feedback solicited from key constituents and information gathered from project documents in relation to expectations achievements and challenges. Part 3 outlines the key issues/challenges moving forwards as identified by the consultant team based on its research. Part 4 provides a summary of discussions and developments which took place during the AC meeting with reflections from the evaluation team. While not originally envisioned, the evaluation team found the addition of this section to be critical as it is at once a reflection on the evaluation exercise and an integral part of it – again evidencing Safar/AEF's commitment to an ongoing critical reflection process. Concluding remarks from the evaluation consultants are presented in Part 5.

Part 2: Summary of feedback from key constituents

2.1 Participants to the evaluation

In line with the proposed methodology, the evaluation sought to collect and reflect back to AEF and AC members the varying perspectives of the full range of its constituencies through project documentation, solicited written reflections (both regular Safar grantee reflections⁴ and those solicited particularly for this evaluation), individual and group interviews and observation. (See Annex 4 for a full list of project documents reviewed.) Questionnaires sent to different constituency groups were designed to encourage respondents to reflect on those issues of most concern to them and involved a series of open-ended questions while probing for concrete examples. (See Annex 5 for questionnaires used for each constituent group.) The rate of response to evaluation team questionnaires was higher than expected, particularly given the quick turn around requested.

Constituent responses for Safar Fund two-year evaluation

Written responses solicited by evaluation						
Constituent group	# of replies				total pool	% of replies
	male	female	# of countries	Total		
Administrative Committee ⁵	4	1	5	5	9	55%
Safar grantees	7	8	8	15	108	14%
Safar regional meeting participants	4	0	4	4	32	13%

Interviews	
	# of interviews
Safar partner organisations interviews	7
Naseej affiliates	2
AEF staff	3

⁴ Of the 108 grantees who benefited from the Safar mobility fund, 76 or some 70% submitted reports to Safar reflecting on their experiences. While the submission of a report is part of the original grant agreement, there is in actual fact, no way for Safar to enforce this commitment which makes the high rate of reporting all the more impressive. The evaluation team found the grantee reports both informative and inspirational and strongly recommends that these be used to greater effect in Safar outreach efforts.

⁵ Founding Committee members written feedback was also solicited. However, no Founding Committee members who are not now connected to Safar in another capacity responded. None the less, 2 of the Naseej affiliates and 5 of the Administrative Committee members who provided written feedback as well as 3 members of AEF working with Safar who were interviewed as part of the evaluation were part of the FC and provided insights into the early days of the Safar project.

2.2 Constituent expectations

Constituents' overall expectations focused primarily on the following areas:

- * developing alternative approach to learning and working with youth
- * promoting a culture of initiative and creativity
- * provision of new learning opportunities for youth in Arab World
- * fostering friendships and humane relations amongst youth across the Arab World
- * fostering joint initiatives and linkages amongst youth across the region
- * building country-based presence and support for Safar's learning vision

There is, in general, a high degree of continuity within and across groups regarding expectations of the Safar project. The AEF and AC's reflections on expectations together indicate the development of a clear and coherent shared vision for Safar over time. In general, grantees of the mobility fund express expectations more consistent with the AEF-AC vision of Safar *after* the completion of their journeys. However, a significant number of young people continue to express expectations that Safar should play a more active role in organising activities and demands often continue to reflect the desire for a more "guided" learning process (more funds, more follow-up, funds for project implementation, etc.) Naseej representatives also expressed expectations that Safar play a more pro-active role in supporting young people through organising preparation and follow-up activities for mobility fund grantees.

In general grantee expectations were met or exceeded. This was less the case for AEF, AC and Naseej representatives. In particular, those involved in the project since its inception originally expected that the mobility fund would primarily fund more "alternative" types of learning encounters, i.e., *tajawor* and *tazawor*.⁶ The expectation had been that given the opportunity, young people would quickly take advantage of funds to create innovative and "out-of-the-box" learning expeditions related to their various initiatives. However, it quickly became apparent that most young people were unable to envision and/or exploit the mobility fund for activities other than participation in the more usual type of structured, organised activities (workshops, conferences, training). The high demand of young people for "ready-made" activities proved to be an ongoing challenge for Safar. Expectations that an (informal) network of youth, engaged in Safar activities, whether locally or regionally, would emerge organically over time was also noted as an expectation not yet met by a number of AEF and AC members. The tension between Safar's vision of opening space and providing resources for young people to create and pursue their own "learning journeys," (i.e., take increasing responsibility for

⁶ *Tajawor* is similar to apprenticeship, whereby a young individual already practicing a certain skill/ field of knowledge organizes to *yatajawor* with someone older with more experience in the same field whom he/she wishes to learn from, not just the technical part of the skill, but also the "human" part, the connection between character, values, and style of life to the work itself. For *tajawor* to be successful, the older person also needs to be interested in the work of the younger person and have a certain level of respect for it. *Tajawor* generally requires a longer time than *tazawor* or visits.

Tazawor is when a young person with an initiative visits another person/ group/ organization to take a closer look at their work, discuss with them what they do, and explore possible ways for mutual learning.

their own learning) and the demands by many young people (and, to a certain extent or at certain points in the project's development, some members of the AC and Naseej/SCF) for Safar to take a more active role in guiding this learning process lies at the heart of the project's experience as will become apparent through this report.

Other significant "surprises" included the importance of regional meetings or "encounters" [*liqa'at*]. AEF, AC, young people engaged in Safar and partner organisations all noted the importance of regional meetings. AEF and AC members, in particular, noted that this importance exceeded original expectations; even though the regional meetings were part of the original plan for Safar, their importance in developing, deepening, and expanding the discussions and understanding of the concept of initiative, as well as fostering the culture of initiative amongst the participating youth and the Safar team became much more apparent after the first meeting was held. AEF members in particular, also noted that the level of responsiveness of community constituents – whether grantees, meeting participants or partner organisations – had far exceeded their expectations. "I didn't expect young people to write," explained one AEF member. "Whatever we ask them to do, they always respond," explained another. The high level of responsiveness and responsibility shown by the AC was also noted as a surprise by AEF. Not only do AC members participate regularly in AC meetings every six months. Members participate regularly in the regional meetings, in regional and in-country events where they represent Safar and engage in the grant and meeting participant selection process on an ongoing basis. AC members also engage in the website discussion forum. The commitment to Safar is well-reflected in written reflections of AC members as well as ongoing discussions related to project activities and development through email and on their shared web space.

For grantees and regional participants, one of the most frequently mentioned surprises was the accessibility and rapid response of Safar to their applications. Youth frequently expected that they would need connections or *wasta* in order to access Safar grants and repeatedly expressed surprise at how straightforward the grant / meeting application process had been and the extent to which Safar trusted their applications on their own merit and without interventions on their behalf, whether from institutions or individuals. Indeed, some youth feared that Safar was too trusting and ought to be more careful about young people who might misuse the fund. The importance of trust as a foundation to Safar relationships with young people became increasingly clear as the evaluation progressed and will be revisited later in this report.

2.3 Key activities and achievements

The chart below presents a summary of key achievements and related activities identified by various constituency groups. These achievements were also clearly reflected in project documentation and evaluation team observations. Safar's summary of project statistics for January 2006 through June 2007, grantee reflections and AC reflections and meeting minutes are particularly useful in verifying these achievements. (See Annex 6 for summary of project statistics. See Annex 7 for selected grantee reflections.)

Key achievements identified through project documentation and constituent feedback

Key achievements	Details
<i>"The power of the idea itself"</i>	
Responding to clear gap / need / demand	"No other organisation is providing resources for young people to pursue their learning with others <u>in the region</u> and <u>without pre- or post-conditions</u> ," (ie no pre-determined outcomes or set requirements about what they do with their learning after the experience); importance of focus on travel <u>in Arab World</u>
Developing and promoting alternative concepts and new approaches	"Safar is something new; it's the first of its kind in terms of its flexibility and diversity – covering all fields and all countries in the Arab World." in-depth dialogue in sub-regional contexts; building continuity through regional meetings; development and adaptation of specific concepts (eg <i>tajawor</i> , <i>tazawor</i>) with time
Establishing new types of relationships with young people and partner organisations	gained confidence and trust after initial suspicion of youth – especially through a quick and straightforward response; surprise of applicants when they don't need <i>wasta</i> ; trusting that youth will use available resources and space to further their learning, if given opportunity; "Safar focuses more on the core issues, making cooperation and partnership easy because there is no pre-determined structure that defines the relationship."
<i>Establishment of youth mobility fund</i>	
Development of grant-making mechanisms	ongoing development of selection process in clear, transparent and responsive manner in Arab World; development of project documents including criteria guidelines, application, <i>mithaq sharaf</i> ; surprising absence of <i>wasta</i> ; development and revision of application forms, application process is comparatively easy; quick response to applicants; rolling application responds to unexpected learning opportunities
<i>Provision of new learning opportunities for youth in Arab World</i>	
Engaging young people in decision-making process	discussion and learning across generations and diversity of experiences and perspectives within AC; participation in grant-making process; participation in planning, evaluation and decision-making process related to project development
Learning through reflection, exchange <u>and</u> doing	AC experience as key learning process; grantees and regional meeting participants; website and discussion forum
Catalyst for further action/initiatives by young people	regional meetings as basis for continuity and accumulation of learning and experience
Fostering friendships and "humane" relations amongst youth across the region	stereotypes challenged; fears overcome; feeling of greater affinity with youth and communities in other Arab countries
Fostering joint initiatives, discussions and linkages amongst youth across the region	linking people, especially Arab youth; weaving, connection, bridge [<i>naseej</i> , <i>tawasol</i> , <i>jisr</i>] e.g., network of popular arts groups emerged from Safar activities (founders were primarily grantees and/or regional participants); regional meetings key; website discussion forum
Promoting recognition and reclaiming of regional assets by young people	excitement about discovering art, culture, people, heritage in Arab World

Key achievements	Details
<i>Providing access to critical information and space for joint reflection and learning</i>	
Developing & disseminating resources	potential of resource book idea; richness of grantee reflections
Database of resources	number of resources up on web; widely used by applicants;
Regional meetings / encounters	space to meet and exchange ideas and experiences amongst diverse group of people; build shared visions and understandings; ensure continuity and accumulation of learning and experience
<i>Creation of an operative regional project</i>	
Creating a regional process / structure	Safar has real regional vision; regional outreach; diversity in countries, ages, areas of work/interest and perspective new members to AC successfully absorbed
Continued commitment to founding principles	ability to learn from and respond to realities on the ground while maintaining original mandate and vision
Establishing an open, learning organisational culture	open discussion; no fear of failure or conflict; mistakes as part of learning process; constantly reflecting on and responding to experiences on the ground; ability to take tough decisions; success in absorbing new AC members
Effective operations of AC	youth membership; geographic diversity; learning process and adaptations; high degree of commitment and engagement
Effective operations of Safar/AEF staff	effective support for applications, preparations and logistics for trips; role of AEF in protecting and advocating for Safar vision and guiding principles
<i>Embracing diversity</i>	
Wide geographic coverage	ability to reach 21 countries; geographic outreach result of regional meetings and forum as well as mobility grants; need for greater on-the-ground support frequently noted by youth and sometimes by AC; importance of wide geographic representation in AC, expansion to include member from Bahrain very important for outreach to Gulf area
Engaging diverse groups of young people	diversity of experience and perspective; diversity of ages and rich inter-generational exchange; diversity in areas of interest / work amongst youth; increasingly known and generated clear excitement amongst youth around region; AC, Safar staff, grantees less satisfied (depth)

With rare exception, constituency groups identified the full range of key achievements identified in the table above. Across constituencies, several informants noted shortcomings in logistical support, meeting preparation and follow-up, particularly in relation to the regional meeting in Bahrain and the regional meeting on the development of a resource on youth initiatives in the Arab World. However, even when AEF, AC, grantees and participants included criticisms or recommendations for improvements in the future, overall assessment of the "Safar team" (whether AEF management and project staff and/or the AC) remained overwhelmingly positive. Both AEF and Naseej noted that AEF needs to be more intensively engaged in overseeing and guiding and supporting project staff. However, Naseej/SCF went on to raise concerns about the ability of the Safar team to manage the youth mobility fund. This was in contrast to the confidence that other constituents demonstrated in AEF and a clear sense that Safar was a natural extension of AEF's work, both in terms of activities and the approach to their implementation. The sharp difference in perceptions may be partially due to the focus of most constituencies, including the AEF and the AC, on the process of Safar while the nature of Naseej's relationship to Safar demands a focus on deliverables as framed in project agreements for which it feels accountable. Furthermore, as a funder, Naseej/SCF is obliged to be more attuned to AEF's financial, organisational and reporting capacities than AEF's other constituents. While AEF, recognised some of the same organisational weaknesses (reporting, accounting), perhaps because it had a much keener sense of project results and

In the words of Safar grantees

الرحلة من بدايتها وحتى آخرها كانت جسراً حقيقياً للتواصل و المعرفة وتحقيق مكاسب إنسانية وعملية وإبداعية لي...
- Lama from Lebanon

أنا شاب من اليمن من سن 17 سنة وأنا مشارك في الأنشطة الاجتماعية والسياسية وصلت سن 22 سنة فقط وقد أصبحت عضو قيادة حزب الخضر مسؤول دائرة التثقيف والاعلام وبعدها بسنة صرت مدير تحرير نشرة خاصة بالشباب المتطوعين بمؤسسة مدى وبعدها بعامين اسست منظمة غير حكومية مهتمة بالشباب والاطفال وبعدها بعامين تم تأسيس اتحاد مدني يضم سبع منظمات شبابية مستقلة يسمى منتدى الشباب المدني وانتخبت وحتى الان رئيساً له وغيرها من الاحداث الصغرى والتحويلات في حياتي والازمات لم اشعر ابدأ بالتقدير والفخر والاعزاز والسعادة العميقة إلا عبر ومن خلال وفي برنامج سفر لأنه يشعرك بالتقدير الذي يجب ان تشعر به من قبل الآخرين التي تضحي من اجلهم في مجتمعنا العربي وهم غير قادرين على تقديرك كما تحتاج. شكرا عميقاً وجداً ودائماً لكل احبائي لقد كدت أن أذرف الدمع من الخجل عندما شعرت بتقديركم وسرعة استجابتكم وحرصكم ورعايتكم الكريمة
- Khalil from Yemen

و خلق جواً رائعاً من التبادل الثقافي بين أنحاء وطننا الكبير و منحنا كشباب فرص للتعرف على تجارب و خبرات أجيال مختلفة (هذه الفقرة غير واضح بدايتها ونهايتها ومن كتبها؟)

من كل قلبي أقول لسفر أنكم كسرتم حاجزاً كبيراً أعاق الكثيرين و جعلتموني أعيش أجمل فرصة في حياتي للتعلم و تقديم تجربتي و إثبات أن لا مستحيل طالما هناك أناس مثلكم يدعمون المبدع العربي الذي لا تتوفر لديه الإمكانيات
- Amani from Yemen

طالما اعتبرته مهما لمسيرتي التعليمية (هذا السطر مقطوع!)
- Mohammed from Morocco

تغيرت توقعاتي عن سفر حيث كنت اعتقد نشاطه نخبوي ولكن حقيقة سفر رائع جدا ويغير في رؤية الإنسان إلى نفسه وعالمه ويزيد من نشاطه التطوعي ويشعر بتقدير للذات والحياة لأنه لقي قبول وتقدير ومساعدته من سفر للتعرف على حياة الآخرين وعاداتهم ووضعهم وتفكيرهم ورويتهم وعالمهم وسوف يستفيد من تجاربهم العملية.
- Khalil from Yemen

impact, it expressed full confidence that it would take the project forward; mistakes were viewed as critical learning opportunities and AEF management and project staff as well as AC members felt that the experiences of the two-year pilot phase of Safar has created a solid foundation for the project's next phase.

Key outcomes of positive youth development

Aspects of Identity	Areas of Ability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Sense of Safety and Structure • High Self-Worth and Self Esteem • Feeling of Mastery and Future • Belonging and Membership • Perception of Responsibility and Autonomy • A Sense of Self-Awareness and Spirituality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Health • Mental Health • Intellectual Health • Employability • Civic and Social Involvement

Excerpted from Academy for Educational and Development's Center for Youth Development and Policy Research in it's on-line document, "What is Youth Development?" (<http://cyd.aed.org/whatis.html>)

"The five C's"

Competence	The ability and motivation for: civic and social engagement; cultural engagement; physical and emotional health; intellectual achievement; productivity and creativity; securing a livelihood
Confidence	Having a sense of: mastery and future; self-efficacy
Character	Having a sense of responsibility and autonomy; spirituality and self-awareness; an awareness of one's own personality or individuality
Connection	Membership and belonging; having a sense of safety and structure
Contribution	Being involved as active participant and decision-maker in services, organizations and/or community(s)

Adapted from Act for Youth, Positive Youth Development Manual (<http://www.actforyouth.net/documents/YDM%20pdf2.2.pdf>)

An examination of feedback from mobility fund recipients and participants to regional meetings, provides a more in-depth picture of the wide range of learning outcomes resulting from young people's engagement in Safar activities. Indeed, grantee and participant feedback suggests that the Safar project contributes positively to most if not all of the core set of areas of ability and aspects of identity identified in the literature on positive youth development and or community youth development outcomes. (See box above for two approaches to classifying youth development outcomes.)

The range of skills and knowledge which young people report gaining through engagement in Safar activities is wide and highly dependent on young people's areas of interest and initiative. Young people report on professional, technical and artistic skills gained as well as organisational, communication and other life skills. In general, however, young people's reflections give far greater emphasis to how engagement in Safar activities has led to a range of affective and social outcomes. The former including, among other outcomes, a greater sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-determination, and the latter emphasising the building of relationships with people in the Arab World – whether artists, human rights activists, development practitioners, intellectuals. Youth also give importance to relationships established with organisations, places, cultures and histories during their journeys (often their first) to particular countries in the Arab World.

Given the importance young people award to connections and relationships gained, it is perhaps not surprising that young people also report that their attitudes, particularly in relation to values and views of young people and of the Arab World, are regularly challenged through their engagement in Safar activities. Yet another set of key outcomes identified by young people relates to the process of "learning to learn." Among the factors cited as critical in this process included: the opportunity to learn through experience and continued learning through collaborative efforts with others working on similar issues met through Safar activities. (See side bar on previous page for excerpts from evaluation questionnaires submitted by young people. See also Annex 7 for a selection of reflections from grantee reports.)

2.4 Key factors of success

Participants to the evaluation identified a range of key success factors. These are listed in the text box below. Underlying many of the success factors identified, whether related to particular Safar team members, approaches or practices, is a strong foundation of trust which informs all aspects of the Safar project. Safar is based on a fundamental trust in young people and the learning process. When expectations are not met, experiences challenge assumptions, mistakes are made or conflicts arise, this trust is sometimes tested. However, despite considerable challenges, Safar has maintained its commitment to open-ended learning by drawing on the conviction that young people are capable of taking responsibility for their learning if they are given the space and access to a range of tools and resources.

Key factors of success

The concept

- the strength of the concept itself
- the project responds to a clear need / demand
- the clear focus on the Arab World

2.5 Key obstacles

Evaluation participants noted a range of obstacles to successful implementation of project activities and realisation of its goals. These included both programmatic and organisational issues. Some of the key obstacles identified by constituents are presented in the text box below.

Key obstacles to success

Programmatic -

- youth are already geared toward learning models manufactured by consumerist culture and the "development industry" and find it difficult to take risks and think "out-of-the-box" about how to use mobility grants to create alternative learning paths
- "we are not used to learning from one another - as young people, as Arabs in the Arab World"
- reaching out to youth at the peripheries or on the margins requires time and different approaches
- internet access excludes too many, not enough has been done to provide other means of accessing Safar resources
- youth who are interested in using the mobility fund don't always know where to go, institutions don't always invite
- a high percentage (roughly 30%) of accepted grantees don't actually travel
- movement restrictions on young people in the region due to political situations, conflicts, and difficulties in securing necessary travel documents often limit or prohibit travel
- youth cannot always absorb the uncovered expenses - local travel, phone calls to arrange travel¹
- although it's gotten better, the grant selection process is still sometimes too long
- the AEF *Jamia'* project was not launched and left a gap as it had been expected to play a key role in developing apprenticeship opportunities
- apprenticeships are demanding in time and resources (\$15,000 and one year planning for most successful)
- the transition period after first Safar coordinator left AEF for another job opportunity
- the serious illness of a key consultant for development of the resource on youth initiatives
- the database has not encouraged the kind of inspirational information hoped for
- Safar has not adequately captured its successes nor built adequately on inspirational role models or creative initiatives

Organisational -

- project staff tend to get absorbed in one aspect of programme, losing sight of others
- lack of consistent presence and support from AEF management¹ (*Al Jamea* project not launched)
- the participatory nature of the project structure means that decision-making is sometimes lengthy and can delay activity implementation
- lack of clarity of roles - AEF, AC and Naseej
- Safar shouldn't be tied to another organisation other than AEF, "Naseej gave the impression that we were smaller than we are."
- poor communication between Safar and Naseej
- Safar had difficulties in reporting in a timely and effective manner, particularly in relation to financial reports
- lack of systematic and accessible documentation
- money transfers are only possible if an AC member is in the given country

2.6 Challenges for the future

Across the board, constituents were unanimous in their belief that Safar project should continue and that in facilitating links between youth across the Arab World, Safar plays a unique role in filling an otherwise significant gap in opportunities available to young people in the region. Perceptions on *how* Safar should develop over the coming three to five years differed, depending largely on the theories and principles (whether articulated or assumed) underpinning constituents' approaches to working with young people. Likewise, key challenges for Safar in its next phase were informed by constituents' varying theories and approaches to working with young people and to the priority issues tied to their particular constituency group. Youth, for example, focused primarily on issues of accessibility and outreach and opportunities for their greater participation in activities and processes. Members of AEF, AC and Naseej identified additional challenges related to project structure, planning and implementation. These constituent groups were also generally more focused on the broader challenges related to future programmatic directions, such as responding to ongoing tensions between supporting an open-ended approach to learning while responding to young people's demands for more structured and organised activities and demands from funders and the public to demonstrate programme efficacy by showing clear set of results. Not surprisingly, many of the future challenges are directly related to the obstacles experienced in Safar's pilot phase summarised in the previous table.

Details on key programmatic and organisational challenges identified by constituents are presented in tables in Annex 8. The tables also include a selection of actions taken, actions recommended by constituents and other possible actions which might be pursued in response to these challenges. A synthesis of the key issues and challenges from the evaluation team's perspective is presented in Part 3 below.

Part 3: Underlying assumptions and key issues going forward

Based on the extensive documentation and feedback from constituents reviewed for this evaluation process, the evaluation team identified five key programmatic and two key organisational challenges for Safar project in the coming phase. These are outlined below and were discussed during the July 2007 AC meeting. The outcomes of these discussions are summarised in Part 4.

Before outlining these key issues, however, it is worth re-examining the underlying assumptions of Safar in light of the information gathered through the evaluation process.

3.1 What are the key assumptions informing Safar's work?

Three basic assumptions underpin the Safar project and its approach to working with young people:

- a mobility fund for youth will encourage youth initiatives and youth learning
- responding effectively to consistent demand by young people in the region for opportunities to meet other young people in the region will contribute to their healthy development; their healthy development contributes to health communities
- Safar activities, including grant-making, regional encounters, its website and the production of resources are reflective of the core spirit of Safar and its commitment to dynamic, interactive open-ended learning processes in which youth assume primary responsibility for their own learning journeys

Visions of Safar

"To help you pursue a healthy process of growth that permits them to develop their individual (and collective) experience and knowledge, they need to be given the space and opportunities to pursue their own learning paths. The rationale was that this fund would:

"1. Encourage youth to search for their own learning opportunities, starting with an exploration of their experiences, their passion, what they want to learn more about, and from whom.

"2. A founding committee and an administrative board of youth ensures that the fund is in direct contact with you and is constantly responsive to their needs and experiences.

"3. The fund does not measure youth or their initiatives or their ideas on a single scale, but rather places emphasis on the effort that the young person has put into developing his/her initiative, in locating a "learning opportunity," and in providing matching resources (no matter how small the contribution might be).

"It was our hypothesis that by offering a mobility fund with these three components / criteria, youth would be encouraged to take initiative, search for their own learning, design their learning opportunities, and develop additional initiatives that spring out of their experiences and which reflect their own construction of knowledge and view of where and how they feel their society needs to move to match their dreams and ambitions."

- 2nd year proposal for Safar submitted to Naseej/SCF

"Safar helps young people who want to take responsibility for their learning/ who have an initiative they want to pursue. Safar provides the opportunity without pre- or post-conditions and without demands on how... You are responsible for what you do with your experience."

- AEF regional director, interview, 21 July 2007

3.2 To what extent are these key assumptions valid?

Research undertaken for this evaluation indicates that:

- Safar clearly responds to an otherwise unmet demand in the region in so far as it provides young people the opportunity to travel in the region on journeys inspired by and designed to respond to their own dreams and objectives without the imposition of conditions, prior to or post travel.
- The assumption that young people are ready, able and willing to take up this opportunity once it's on offer was challenged by the first two years' experience. Youth approaching Safar had much greater difficulty in "thinking out of the box" simply because Safar offered them the opportunity to do so. Safar's

learning approach of action/reflection [praxis] has supported the development of a number of effective responses to this challenge. The closure of Safar's pilot phase provides a valuable opportunity for re-examining how best to approach this challenge moving forward.

- The operation and development of Safar strongly reflects its commitment to the ongoing process of learning and to the fostering of creativity and initiative. This is particularly apparent in the reflective and responsive approach to the management and government structures and processes which it continues to develop and in the continued development and transformation of programme activities. As one Safar team member explained: "There is nothing in Safar that is the same as it was when we started. Everything changed in response to what happened and what we learned." "I loved the problems more than the successes," noted one Safar team member explaining the value she gave to the learning process.

At the same time, project documentation and feedback solicited through evaluation process suggest that after nearly two years of operations, there are a number of critical issues which Safar should address to ensure that its activities, processes, mechanisms and structures are responsive to and supportive of the programme's vision and objectives.

3.3 Key programmatic issues

1. Revisiting objectives – What do the first two years of experience mean for Safar Fund's long-term and medium-term objectives and the key results it believes it can achieve over the coming 3-5 years?

- The articulation of long-term (overall objectives of Safar) and medium-term objectives (for first and second phases, future phases, for key components/areas of work) shift between documents – where is Safar now?
- How can Safar AC and team better convey its shared vision and translate these into greater clarity about what it does and doesn't seek to do to its constituency(s) and supporters?
- What variables in process and structure should be fixed over medium- and long-term to allow for experiment/experience to be tested and what are open to revision/change in response to experiences? (eg. Arab World, age range)
 - Who decides and how? What criteria could help distinguish between what's open for discussion and what's not (at least for coming phase)?
 - How can the fixed variables be better communicated and explained to Safar constituencies?

2. Revisiting Safar's primary constituency – Who is Safar Fund seeking to engage with?

- Does Safar target initiators only? Or does it seek to encourage a culture of initiative among those not yet fully able to take initiative on their own? (ie, "mubadara" or "mubadareen"?)

- Should Safar do massive outreach to get 10 applicants or rather target those who are most likely to actually apply?
- Is there an inherent contradiction in targeting "mubadareen" and targeting those who receive less opportunity? Is some kind of affirmative action required on Safar's part?
- Should Safar respond to demands that it promote not only learning within the Arab World but foster learning (about the Arab World) amongst youth globally (multi-directional learning and exchange)?

3. Revisiting key areas of activity – Does Safar need to keep doing what it's doing but get better at it or does it need to do things differently? Where and how?

- Are there other or additional ways of promoting the vision, fundamental concepts and principles of Safar Fund? (eg. concrete examples, coaching, documentation, build on existing initiative experiences)
 - Should Safar place more emphasis on "laying the groundwork" and less on travel grants? (eg regional meetings)?
 - Should Safar organise apprenticeship opportunities? If so, how should it select them and how often should it do so? How could these be structured to encourage partners to increasingly create these opportunities independently over time?
 - How can partnerships like those with El-Talier be reproduced and strengthened so that Safar can count on other institutions to provide the supports and services youth need to pursue their initiatives and self-designed learning paths?
- What's the appropriate role of Safar in facilitating/supporting learning processes?
 - To what extent should Safar complement opportunity with support to individuals (eg. preparation of trip – where, linking with resource people, finding host, etc.; welcome and support on the ground during trip; follow up networking, additional opportunities, etc) or will this undermine our objective of fostering initiative?
 - Can / should Safar be more proactive in supporting youth to develop initiatives?
 - Should / how can Safar build on and continue learning process post-travel?

4. Revisiting Safar Fund's scope and outreach – Does Safar Fund want to expand its outreach?

- Should Safar expand? If so, how? In what directions? (eg. geographically: vertical/horizontal, clustering; mobility grant interest areas: vertical/horizontal; mobility grant types: vertical/horizontal; resource development; support activities; outreach activities....)
 - Can Safar Fund expand the scope of its activities while remaining consistent to its principles? If so, how? If not, then what?
 - What's required for effective expansion?
 - Should Safar Fund go South-South? Global?
- To what extent should Safar support / assume responsibility for country level activities and funds? To what extent should these emerge organically and be locally supported?

5. Sharing and celebrating success – How can outcomes be better shown to encourage further support for Safar's vision and "movement"?

- How can Safar better "capture" and share results of its activities? (for Safar participants? for potential Safar participants? for young people and their communities more generally? for partners network? for friends and funders?)
- How can Safar better demonstrate the "cost-effectiveness" of its activities?
- How can Safar best share its experience in piloting this project to contribute to learning processes of interested young people, communities and institutions?

3.5 Key organisational issues

1. Revisiting the organisational structure – Are the roles of all bodies clear (internally and externally) and appropriate? Should they be revised? (GA, AC, AEF, Safar staff, partners network, youth network)

- How can the role of AC continue to be supported / strengthened / made more effective?
 - Is too much expected of AC as group of volunteers?
 - Is the decision-making process too cumbersome? If so, what can be done to improve it?
 - Should the AC membership be expanded? Changed?
- What should the role of AEF be going forward? in the next 3-5 years? in the longer term?
 - Should AEF management time be budgeted for to ensure more continuity in terms of its presence, management and support?
 - Should Safar explore becoming an independent body? If so, why and how?
- What role does Safar hope that its partners and the partners network can play?
 - How can its role be better understood and strengthened?
- How can the youth network be activated and for what purposes?
 - To what extent should Safar facilitate and support (financially/technically) v. allowing it to emerge and develop locally and organically?
- How can the role of Safar staff be best supported and strengthened?
 - Does AEF support to the team need to be increased?
 - Should the team be expanded in numbers / levels of expertise?
 - Should staff be hired in the different sub-regions?
 - Could a regular internship programme be built into Safar activities to support the team's work (as well as promoting Safar concepts, supporting ongoing activities, and providing learning to facilitate strengthening of local initiatives)
- Is there a need for a General Assembly? If so, how can it be activated and for what purposes?
 - Is the General Assembly different from the youth network? If so, how?
 - Will membership be individual or institutionally based?

- Should Partners Network members be part of General Assembly?

2. Resource mobilisation: fund raising and friend raising – What resources does Safar need to realise its aspirations?

- Naseej - Safar Fund partnership – Is there added value in Safar Fund and Naseej continuing partnership? If so, how and on what basis?
 - Could RAC play more effective role?
 - Could Safar strengthen Naseej's regional work? Vice versa?
- What level of funding does Safar need?
- What types of funding should Safar target and from whom?
- How can Safar better utilise nascent youth and partners networks in support of its objectives?
- How can Safar get better at communicating with its resource networks (funders and friends)?

Part 4: Evaluation sessions during the AC meeting (26-28 July, 2007)

Following the collection of feedback from stakeholders, the evaluation team presented a summary of key issues and challenges to the AEF and AC at the AC's fourth meeting. The evaluation team also benefited from observing the regional meeting held prior to the AC meeting (23-25 July). Reflections on the evaluation sessions below are therefore informed by the opportunity to observe the regional meeting and engage with its participants.

4.1 Time line and carousel exercises

To begin discussions with the AC and AEF's staff engaged in Safar project, the evaluation team introduced two exercises. Both exercises were organised to encourage individual reflection and then joint discussion and provided the framework for the discussion over the three days.

In the time line exercise, everyone was asked to individually reflect on and jot down on sticky notes key events, achievements and/or challenges and place these at the time they happened on a large time line posted on the wall beginning in January 2005 and ending in December 2007. The time line was divided in half with sticky notes at the top reflecting on programmatic events/issues and the bottom reflecting more on organisational events/issues.

In the carousel exercise, each of the seven key issues or challenges identified by the evaluation team were posted on a separate flip chart sheet and each group member was asked to reflect on these and write key questions or challenges related to each of these issues on green sticky notes and any answers or recommendations relevant to the key issue on blue sticky notes and post them on the relevant flip charts.

Throughout the three days, people continued to add sticky notes to both the time line and carousel charts to reflect further ideas coming out of the discussions.

The time line, filled up with sticky notes, was used to encourage people to tell stories about particular incidents and their significance and to build the collective story of Safar. The group identified major turning points in the story and discussed titles for Safar story's major chapters as well as an overall title as part of the reflection process on achievements and challenges. The exercise confirmed the high level of commitment and engagement of AC members throughout the life of the project. It highlighted the importance of regional meetings and AC meetings in the project's development process and in the internal learning process of the AC team.

The integral link between the space for AC members to participate in decision making and engage in direct action for both the development of the AC and Safar project activities noted in stakeholder feedback and observed in the regional meeting was again apparent. Participation by AC members in the regional meeting, grant selection processes and other planning and outreach work has fostered a culture of learning within the project

development process itself. The AC and AEF were able to reflect on experiences based on their conversations with young people through regional meetings as well as their activities in their home countries, analyse weaknesses and challenges, suggest and critique alternatives and make decisions on how to respond with confidence. Mistakes were made and addressed, challenges were met and others have arisen but an accumulation of small successes has provided the team with both confidence and competencies to move forward without fear of conflict or failure. This is, in and of itself, a critical achievement of the Safar project and one that has not yet been well-captured in project documents and reports.

The carousel exercise was used to frame the bulk of the discussions throughout the three days and to facilitate a discussion on how to respond to the key issues / challenges in planning for Safar's next phase of activity. A brief summary of the evaluation team's reflections on these discussions and key outcomes is provided below.

4.2 Key programmatic issues

1. Revisiting objectives – What do the first two years of experience mean for Safar Fund's long-term and medium-term objectives and the key results it believes it can achieve over the coming 3-5 years?

Discussion

A brainstorming session on Safar's overall aim raised the following points:

- learning through linkage / exposure / exchange / experience young people to inspirational initiatives
- inspiration – interactive process
- promoting discussion of key concepts
- building on what's present [youth initiative] and responding to a gap [resources which young people in the Arab World can use to create and pursue their learning through connecting, exchange and shared experiences *in* the Arab World]
- movement / co-motion [*hirak*]

Key components of Safar's work noted by the group included:

- mobility grants
- database
- space for conversation and exploration of key concepts and promotion of alternative understandings of learning [*hiwar*] (regional meetings)
- resources

Key questions explored in the discussion included:

- ? The person / the act / the process / the idea: where does Safar target it's intervention
- ? How do we deal with the original assumption that all youth needed was the travel money and the reality that youth find it difficult to think/act outside of the box in terms of pursuing their "learning journeys"

Based on discussions, it was agreed that Safar's overall aim can be summarised as:

To contribute to building a culture of learning, initiative and inspiration amongst youth in the Arab World

The process of this building involves a number of possible steps:

1. Searching for and research on initiatives
2. Providing examples – ie, make visible the less visible/invisible initiatives of young people (alternatives to dominant discourse of consumer culture)
3. Providing resources for young people to move and connect -- \$ to travel; information regarding individuals and institutions with which youth can link with in their "learning journeys" and examples of youth initiatives; and space to engage in exploration and exchange of experiences, ideas, concepts and understandings
4. Organising learning opportunities

The AC and AEF agreed that Safar is focused on the first three steps. Safar is not focused on organising young people's learning opportunities. Safar focuses on providing resources – mechanisms, tools, space – which young people can use to organise their learning. Safar is focused on encouraging young people to create their own paths to learning. This means providing a space where youth can experiment and fail and requires a fundamental trust that young people, provided the opportunity, will create their own way. At the same time, the experience of the past two years has clearly shown that while there is a demand for mobility funds, the expectations that youth would choose less structured, alternative, "out-of-the box" paths to learning fell significantly short of expectations as indicated by the inability of Safar to meet original minimum targets for *tazawor* or *tajawor* rather than the third category of travel grants supported by Safar "activities" which refers to organised activities (workshops, conferences, training, etc.). In addition to schooling, young people in the region are bombarded with a seemingly infinite array of ready-made, formatted learning activities and it is clearly a challenge to see beyond these to alternative approaches. In this context, the importance of engaging more pro-actively with institutions in the region, able to work *with* young people in organising their unique learning journeys, was underlined. While AEF and AC recognise the importance of this role, they do not see it as their role. Neither their mandate nor the mechanisms they have developed to meet this mandate are appropriate for this role. However, it was agreed that based on the past two years' experience Safar could get better at engaging / partnering with organisations who can fulfil this role and advocating for organisations to take up this role in ways which are more youth-friendly and ensure that youth are active in and take greater responsibility for shaping and pursuing their own learning processes. It was also suggested that this context requires that Safar be more pro-active in its role in searching for and bringing to light inspirational and alternative youth initiatives.

Drawing on AC discussions in this session, Safar's vision can be articulated as: a thriving culture of learning and initiative across the Arab World leads to dynamic, creative co-motion and community. The process of building this culture is pursued internally within Safar and externally with Safar's wide range of partners and constituents.

2. Revisiting Safar's primary constituency – With whom is Safar Fund seeking to engage?

Discussion

Key questions explored during the group discussion included:

- ? do we focus on initiators or all young people as part of building a culture of initiative
- ? we reach at most around 1,000 young people (200 grants, 80 regional meeting participants, 200 e-forum participants and around 37,000 visitors to website, 500 young people engaged in outreach activities of AC and project coordinator) of some 150,000,000 young people in the Arab World – we have to target young people who can make a difference
- ? seeking diversity – of learning/initiative experiences and perspectives, as well as gender/sex, country, geographic local (periphery/centre), age
- ? seeking to provide alternative opportunities, we value alternatives to consumer culture
- ? focusing on young person who wants to learn
- ? don't want only young people who think like us
- ? we're still looking / discovering – we need to develop and strengthen mechanisms for finding young people
- ? how do we reach young people from the periphery? – affirmative action?
- ? what do we mean by young people who have less opportunity? this is not our terminology... opportunity for what?

Agreement

Safar seeks to engage young people:

- who want to learn
- who can/are making a difference in their communities by engaging in initiatives
- who represent a diversity of backgrounds and experiences, particularly those "on the margins" or periphery

Safar recognises that power structures dis/advantage young people's opportunities/abilities to access Safar resources and Safar is committed to ensuring that Safar increasingly reaches out to these young people through an affirmative action approach.

3. Revisiting key areas of activity – Does Safar need to keep doing what it's doing but get better at it or does it need to do things differently? Where and how?

Discussion

Current key areas of activity identified by the group included: grants, regional meetings, data base, website and forum and development of resources.

New or expanded activities discussed included:

- Publicity materials? (postponed to discussion of #5)

- what about a camp – open space where young people engage with adults in exchange, discussion and exploration of a diversity of initiatives and learning approaches and find inspiration to continue shaping their own learning?
- need to activate a 2-way conversation / relationship with partner and potential partner organisations – organise regional meetings for organisations, include them in camp
- Local mobility funds – we've talked about them almost since start but they haven't happened even though there have been organisations and potential resources to create them in several countries. Why not? It's not Safar's role to organise them – needs to be initiated and led locally.
- Supporting internal travel? – AC needs to be more active in searching for and bringing to light initiatives and learning opportunities in country

Discussions highlighted the dynamic process of action and reflection pursued by the AC and AEF in the Safar project and the ongoing process of adapting and developing activities and processes to respond to experiences on the ground. The increasing importance of the regional meetings as a space for exchange and discussion and a potential space where young people could gain the confidence as well as create connections for their learning journeys, for example, has led to greater emphasis on diversity of age, experience and initiatives in these meetings. The importance of AC engagement in regional meetings was also discovered with time. As both participants and mentors, AC members could share accumulated experience and learning related to their own initiatives, others encountered through Safar and that of the Safar initiative itself. At the same time, participation in regional meetings ensured that the AC played a key role in keeping Safar attuned to the issues, concerns and challenges of young people on the ground. The maturity of the AC's level of discussion was perhaps most clearly reflected in the discussion of the local mobility funds. Country-based mobility funds has long been on their agenda as a priority activity. However, critical reflection on the issue two years down the road led them to conclude that the emergence of local funds requires it to first be a local priority inspired by local initiative. The group was very aware that with this approach "things take time" but that rushing processes could lead to pre-designed answers and a pre-empting of the learning they are committed to fostering.

The combination of humility, patience, commitment and passion with which the group approached their work was inspirational. The rich exchange and reflection and the effective decision making amongst a group diverse in age, experience and perspective and coming from eight different countries across the Arab World, nine people who had not known one another just two years ago, is a clear testimony to AEF's own commitment to pursuing an open, dynamic and participatory learning process not simply in the delivery of the Safar project but as an integral part of its development.

Throughout the discussion, it became apparent that AEF's ability to recognise that "things take time" and to provide the space and time critical to learning how to do things better has been fundamental to the Safar project whether it be for engaging with AEF staff and the AC in shaping Safar itself or in engaging with young people through regional meetings or mobility grants.

4. Revisiting Safar Fund's scope and outreach – Does Safar Fund want to expand its outreach?

Discussion

Among the key points of discussion were:

- we should focus on deepening what we're doing now and doing it better.
- we have learned a lot in two years and now is time to consolidate what we've learned to better meet our current targets.
- we should explore how to better be advocates for youth-friendly, learning-friendly mechanisms and approaches with other organisations who provide complementary services and opportunities, eg Embassy funds for travel.
- we should use minimum targets to reflect all our activities – not just grants.
- we should focus on strengthening selected countries – those we've not yet reached well, a kind of affirmative action approach – focusing meetings and visits etc in selected countries.
- we need to focus on building local support through individuals and organisations and keeping the Safar team lean.
- we need to continue to be proactive in getting young women involved, participation statistics are consistently a few percentage points lower for young women.
- we also need to focus on keeping / enhancing diversity in the areas of activity/interest amongst young people as this diversity enriches exchange, discussion, learning.

5. Sharing and celebrating success – How can outcomes be better shown to encourage further support for Safar's vision and "movement"?

Discussion

The importance of face-to-face, personal experience in understanding what we're about. Participation.

We need to find other forms of conveying our message and encouraging discussion, like using the AEF film in the Jordan regional meeting.

We need to get better at documenting our experiences – maybe using audio-visual will help better capture it.

We should highlight through grantee reflections an initiative of the week or month on the web.

We should have AC reflections highlighted monthly on the web.

We need to use grantee reports better – get them back on the web, explore ways of posting film clips and use web cameras for communications.

4.3 Programme plans

Based on the above discussions, the AC agreed on a number of key issues which will guide the planning and implementation of Safar activities in the coming period.

Criteria for next two years beginning 1 August 2007

The following clarifications and adaptations were agreed by AC --

A. Criteria for travel grants

1) Age:

- 15-35 years for individual applicants
- 18 and up for those applicants submitted via institutions who will serve as "mentors" in *tajawor*

2) Costs covered:

- *tajawor* and *tazawor* grants can cover 100% ticket + accommodation + learning tools required for trip [agreed in previous AC meeting]
- maximum grant size raised to \$1,500
- maximum grant size for internal travel \$200 available for *tazawor* or *tajawor* for 10 large countries (Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Morocco, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Somalia, Mauritania)**

3) Repeat grantees:

- 3 times maximum (no waiting period) including Camp but excluding participation in regional meeting
- additional criteria to ensure building / continuation of learning process

4) Targets related to types of grants:

Developments over past two years - The realisation that mobility grant mechanisms and experience showed that the former two types of "alternative" approaches to learning require further groundwork and encouragement as young people are not easily able to think of how to use the mobility grants in "out-of-the-box" ways led to the following adaptations between Sep 2005 and July 2006:

- All grant applications, even those submitted via institutions, are considered on an individual applicant basis.
- applications through institutions provided two possible advantages: the 35 year age limit for mentors engaged with young people in *tazawor* and *tajawor* was lifted; the possibility of supporting a number of individuals to the same event or from the same organization would be given greater consideration.
- revision of targets to *tazawor*, *tajawor* and activities at 40%, 40% and 20% respectively.

The AC agreed to the following additional adaptations:

- from Aug 2007, the target will be a minimum of 50% *tazawor* and *tajawor*.
- targets are minimum (and not maximum targets).
- targets will be examined both in terms of \$ amounts and # of grants.
- a record will also be kept of combination grants – eg, activity + *tazawor* as evaluation results suggest that combinations often best serve to facilitate the understanding and pursuit of alternative / unstructured learning processes.

5) Targets related to country distribution:

- quotas represent minimum targets.
- in considering country quotas, selection should keep in mind that on average 30% of accepted grantees are unable to use their grants.
- quotas should include grantee origin and destination as well as regional meeting and

- camp participants.
 - quotas should be set for and tracked in terms of \$ amounts and # of grants.
- 6) Age, male/female, geographic locations (centre/periphery) and fields of interest should be tracked to ensure ongoing commitment to diversity.

**to be tested for one year and reviewed by AC

B. Criteria for regional events

Same as for grantees.

Priority will be given to diversity of ages and experiences on the basis that the regional meetings are designed as fora for discussion based on the exchange of and collective reflection on experiences of engagement in initiatives

C. Criteria for database

- The lists are open to all initiatives, institutions which do not contradict Safar's basic principles and values.
- Safar staff will be responsible for evaluating eligibility and posting but should refer to AC in instances of uncertainty.
- AC will be responsible for oversight and following up with Safar staff in instances of concern.

D. General

- Mobility grants will continue to be limited to travel within the Arab World for the coming two years.
- The Camp will provide for the possibility of South participants as mentors/facilitators to begin fostering links between young people in the Arab World and the South.

The discussion of whether or not to open up Safar mobility grants to support travel to countries in the South beyond the Arab World has been an ongoing one. Minutes of the Founding Committee and other initial documents provided for this possibility in the future while not requiring it at the outset. Some young people have also requested that grants cover travel to other parts of the world like Europe. The question of whether Safar might support travel costs for Arab youth outside of the Arab World to come to the Arab World (or elsewhere) was also raised. Grantee reflections included suggestions that Safar should support greater understanding amongst youth, not only within the Arab World but the rest of the world given the rise of anti-Arab discourse in the West. Discussions at the meeting showed clear agreement that Safar was not about supporting travel to Europe or other countries in the North given the availability of other resources for this and Safar's basic commitment to encouraging greater exchange among youth in the Arab World. Moreover, while some young people continue to demand resources for going "West" the feedback from grantees and meeting participants overwhelmingly emphasizes the importance of discovering the richness and diversity of history, culture, creativity, initiative and learning opportunities within their own region.

The AEF and AC recognised that the tendency to "look West" inculcated in young

people in the region from an early age, it takes time to encourage young people to look within for learning opportunities and expanding the scope of activity before this process is more strongly rooted and widespread could disrupt it. Thus although it was acknowledged that there is a demand and need for exchange between youth in the Arab World and other South countries and between youth in the Diaspora and the Arab World, Safar should continue to limit its mobility grants to travel within the Arab World for at least the next two years. The sense was that Safar was now well positioned to begin deepening and broadening its outreach and activity within the Arab World building on the accumulated learning on how to do it better and the emerging network of individuals and organizations who can participate in Safar's motion/movement [*hirak*]. Moreover, it was agreed that it was important that Safar not expand beyond its current means – in terms of financial, human and organizational resources.

Additionally, it was felt that the agreement to explore provision of grants for internal travel in the ten largest Arab countries over the next year represented a significant challenge and that expanding the scope of work should be slow, allowing for trial and reflection. Following the same reasoning, it was agreed that the annual Camp event which they agreed to pursue and develop would be an ideal place to experiment on a small scale with the opening of exchange and dialogue with the South by including among the participants, mentors/facilitators from the South with inspiring initiatives and experience to share.

The agreed revisions in criteria for selection to Safar's various activities again reflect the ongoing reflection and learning process within Safar and set a sound framework for its continued progress toward its program objectives and the overall aim of Safar for the coming phase. The AC and AEF were jointly able to build on a clarified understanding of Safar's objectives and the role it seeks to play in the process of building a culture of learning and initiative to continue the process of adjusting and adopting its activities and mechanisms to more effectively meet its aspirations.

Several additional mechanisms might be considered to further Safar's objectives:

- Setting a minimum target of 70% or participants 35 years and under for activities with no upper age limit.
- Setting a minimum target for first time grantees and participants to regional events to ensure that the shift toward greater recognition of providing the opportunity for accumulation of learning through repeat access to Safar resources does not overshadow the need for continued outreach.

Plans for remainder of 2007

The AC discussed in detail the challenge created by the time constraints on Naseej⁷ on the one hand, and the added value of having several more months to complete the first phase of Safar project's activities, on the other. There was clear consensus that it would

⁷ The Naseej project's first phase ends in December 2007. A firm commitment from Ford Foundation on a second phase will not be secured before October 2007. In this context, Naseej expressed its concern about approving any no-cost extension on its current grant to Safar which is slated to close at the end of September. To date, Safar has not submitted a no-cost extension request in writing.

be preferable, if possible, to secure a no-cost extension through the end of December 2007.⁸

In recognition of Naseej's concerns, it was proposed to develop two scenarios for discussion with Naseej – one for a reallocation of funds to be spent within the given time, i.e. to the end of September 2007, and the second for a no-cost extension of three months, if Save could find a way to accommodate this. An outline of activities under the two scenarios was then drafted by AEF staff and discussed by the AC, in order for the Regional Coordinator to present it to Naseej in due time.

The evaluation team believes that the Safar project would greatly benefit from a no-cost extension of three months, i.e. until the end of December 2007. As noted elsewhere in this report, the approach to learning, integral to the development of the Safar project, has taken more time than had originally been expected. After witnessing the quality of the discussion process between the main decision-makers, followed by their capacity to make appropriate decisions, the evaluation team feels confident that AEF, the AC and the Safar staff have all the elements in their hands to present to Naseej a credible proposal whose aim is to consolidate progress to date and meet targeted outcomes for the first phase, as well as finalize plans for a second phase of activities.

4.4 Key organisational issues

1. Revisiting the organisational structure – Are the roles of all bodies clear (internally and externally) and appropriate? Should they be revised?

Today the different bodies making Safar are:

- AEF – management and staff
- Administrative Committee
- Founding Committee
- Partners network
- Youth network

The evaluation team revisited these bodies one by one in order to evaluate how the processes happening at the programmatic level are being translated at the organisational level.

- AEF staff

AEF staff, at the time of the evaluation, was made of 2 full-time positions –the regional coordinator and the grants coordinator– and four part-time positions –the webmaster, the accountant, the administrative assistant and, more recently, a fundraiser. A third full-time position has been outlined by the AEF and approved by Naseej but still needs to be filled.

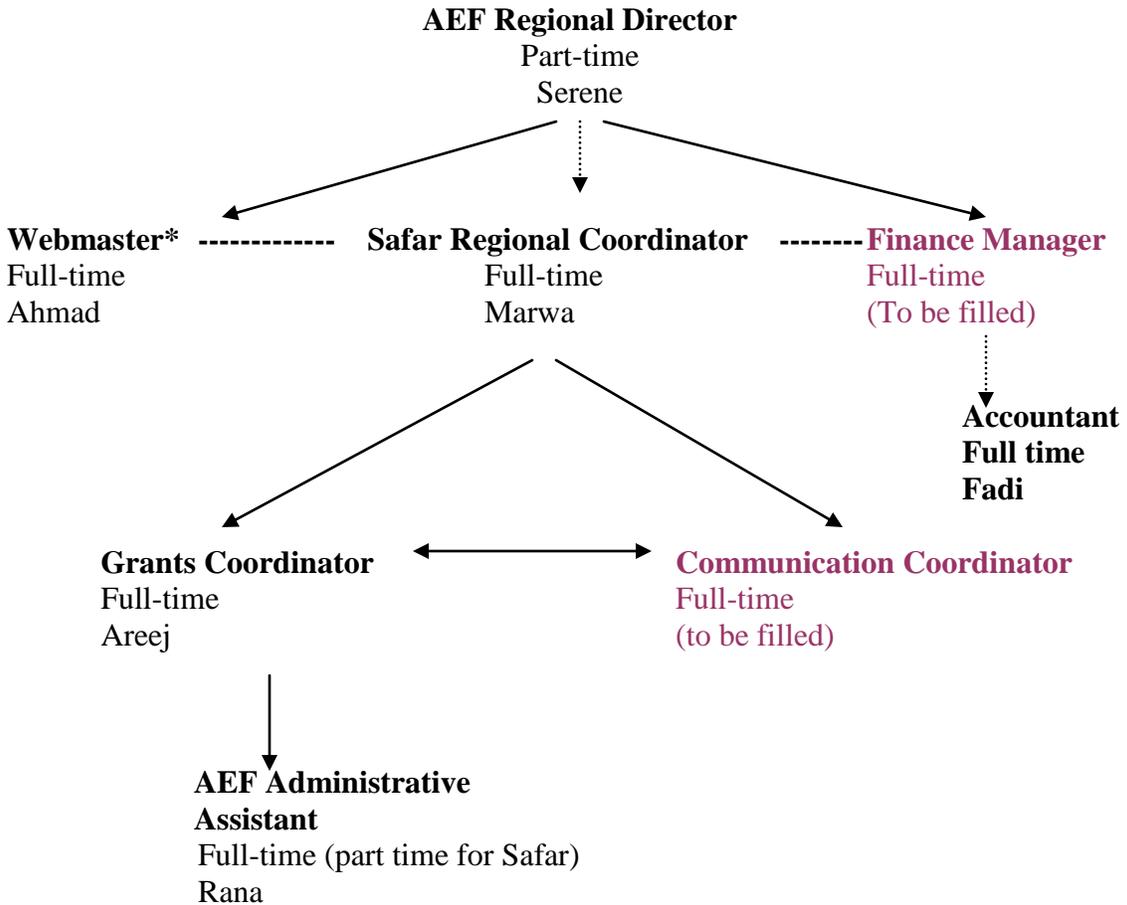
⁸ Because the end of the grant period for the FF grant to SCF, which includes support for the youth mobility fund, is December 2007, there had been an expectation on AEF's part that a no-cost extension would not be problematic. The structure of the Ford grant did not facilitate adequate clarity on this issue between the two organisations early on and the discovery of contradictory assumptions appears to have contributed to tensions between Naseej and Safar.

Each position was initially outlined in a job description. The line of reporting was clearly drawn. Since then, evolutions have taken place and new positions have been created. A full review of job descriptions and lines of reporting is being done by the new coordinator. The arrival of Marwa Seoudi at the time of this internal evaluation is an appropriate occasion to do such a review. It appears that some of the issues underlined by the constituents can be corrected rapidly through a redistribution of tasks on the one hand, and a readjustment of the post yet to be filled on the other.

For example, the late reporting to Naseej/FF has already been corrected by establishing a direct line of reporting of the accountant to the regional coordinator, herself responsible for ongoing relationships with Naseej, including writing quarterly reports and other official requests.

The Grants Coordinator, a position formalized two months ago, is the main contact person for all grantees, thus limiting logistical shortcomings as well as the grant selection delay. Her job description clearly states that she is also responsible for “promoting possibilities of visits and apprenticeships in connection to applications received, to maximize the benefits from the grant, if approved.” This should address, to a certain extent, the gap to be filled on developing apprenticeship opportunities.

Proposed Safar Fund Staff Chart



* When the Communication Co-ordinator is hired, he/she will be doing the work the webmaster is currently doing and the RC will liaise with the webmaster on programming issues and not content issues as is the case now

The need for upgrading the website to make it more youth-friendly since it is the main outreach and communication tool between the constituents, has been identified as a priority to be addressed by the new position yet to be filled. That person will update the website regularly and bring out the “stories” to be highlighted, as requested by all. S/he will be responsible for managing the Forum, the main opportunity for exchange outside the meetings. Therefore, a journalist/researcher profile with strong Arabic-language writing skills, strong research skills and a clear understanding of and passion for youth issues and Safar’s philosophy should be sought.

In addition, AEF has been calling on consultants on a regular basis to bring needed competencies on special subjects such as:

- Arabic language resources
- Exploring initiatives in the Arab world
- Film making
- Graphic design
- Fundraising

As it takes some time and effort to get acquainted with Safar's ways and philosophy, AEF understandingly has worked with people who shared a community of views.

- AEF management

The Safar Fund is one of three current projects under AEF management. Serene Huleileh is AEF Regional Director and one of its founders. As such, her role lies with safeguarding and developing the vision and concept of each project that AEF is implementing. However, at the outset of a new project, her more intensive engagement is needed in the implementation and staff management, until appropriate mechanisms and processes are well established.

Both AEF Safar staff and Naseej felt the need for the more consistent presence of AEF Director to provide managerial support and facilitate more timely decision-making. We therefore looked into the decision-making process, in particular regarding grant application approvals which happen each month. Applications arrive by mail. The grants coordinator is the first person to process the applications by adding factual information such as "second application" or "was rejected once" or by giving statistical information such as "quota for such a country met." Then, the regional coordinator adds her assessment on the content of the application and its quality. Applications are then sent to all AC members for their vote within 5 days. In case of unclear voting, the regional coordinator is the final decision-maker. If the RC feels she needs support in making the final decision, she consults with the head of the AC and the decision is taken jointly. While technically the AC engages in voting, a more consensus-building approach has emerged with AC members identifying concerns whether in favour or opposed to less straightforward applications and a shared collective decision is usually reached.

As evaluators, we experienced the fluidity of communication by mail, with the AEF RD and with the AC. Our opinion therefore is that the problem does not lie so much with the absence of the AEF RD, but with the need for more of a sense of security and confidence on the part of the staff. It is indeed a challenge, in the same way as it is for the youth, to take responsibility for all the space that is given to them and especially to the RC. As mentioned above, the new RC is fully aware of what is expected of her as far as providing a greater sense of security and confidence to the staff and being more demanding on the AEF RD's time and input when needed. In fact, the engagement of the AEF director progressed toward a more "hands-off" approach during the second year of the project as the first RC demanded more space and independence in her coordinating role. From the perspective of AEF director and AC members, this transition did not reflect negatively on the project and progress on project objectives in the second year generally support this view. None the less, in the second year, the loss of the original RC understandably created an unexpected set of challenges (and opportunities) and ongoing weaknesses in financial reporting have yet to be satisfactorily addressed.

Again AEF philosophy is reflected in its management style. The choice of a non-interventionist approach and the choice of deliberately testing “new ways” in the management of the Safar project make for the originality and uniqueness of this youth project. The challenge for Safar is to find an effective mix of support and space in the learning process for its staff – a mix that is expected to be dynamic and responsive to staff development and learning as well as the developmental process of the project itself.

Both Naseej and Safar have found in the Ford Foundation a funder willing to take measured risks to give them a chance to develop their project in their own terms. Looking at what their differences are with a more traditional approach seems pertinent at this point to understand how the philosophy impacts on the management.

Traditional approach	Safar Fund’s approach
Targets institutions and organizations	Engages individuals first
Results-oriented	Process-oriented
Outcomes are defined at start of project	Opening up options and opportunities for not yet identified learning outcomes
Value in success (reaching targets)	Value in risk taking, in the act of initiating
Organises learning opportunities	Provides resources and space for youth to structure their own learning opportunities
Activities structured for youth	Empty space to be filled by youth
Builds skills through training of youth	Lets youth discover what they know and what they want to learn
Works “for” and/or “with” youth	Collaborative, multi-directional learning across generations and across actors within and outside project
Sector-specific orientation	Open to all sectors and encouraging cross-sector /interdisciplinary learning and exchange
Timely spending indicates successful project development and execution; under spending indicative of poor planning or failure to meet targets in timely fashion	Operating on low budget indicates successful project development and execution; under spending can be indicative of project's increasing strength
Consequences in management	
Planning oriented	Organic development
Time frames are clearly defined	Time belongs to process
Hierarchical management	Management is a process, a space for learning
The project adapts to the structure	The structure adapts to the project
Adding staff as activities develop	Maintaining as lean a team as possible with the locus of activity and responsibility shifting outwards rather than inwards

Outcomes are predictable and generally measurable or trackable	Learning (process) is itself the primary objective, specific outcomes are defined in process and vary from young person to young person
Spending responds to planned schedule	Spending is responsive to process

The Safar Fund approach creates particular challenges, specifically in management and structure, the most striking of which is in the spending. Safar Fund looks to spending as little as possible in order not to reinforce the dominant message that action requires funding.

Therefore AEF targets funders who can, not only understand this approach, but also work it out in their procedures. In all cases, AEF will have to put more efforts in communicating its results, reporting in a timely manner, and articulating and meeting appropriate targets, especially budget wise and time wise.

- Founding Committee

A group of 25 people from nine different Arab countries came together in July 2005 to develop the youth mobility fund idea and the overall framework of the project. They became the Founding Committee. The FC nominated a smaller operational group called the Administrative Committee to take the project forward. By December 2005, the Safar project had been "founded" and the FC's role as such had been completed. The AC communicated the completion of the founding phase to all FC members and requested members to notify the AC of their interest in becoming members of the planned "General Assembly" at a future date

- Administrative Committee

The AC is comprised of 9 members from Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Bahrain. They were Founding Committee members, nominated because of their experience in youth work and engagement in and commitment to learning and their willingness to commit the necessary time and energy. Members do not represent the organization they work in or volunteer at. They are not eligible for a travel grant. Two members were selected by the AC a year ago to replace two others who were unable to meet their roles and responsibilities as part of the AC..

The AC meets twice a year, generally before or after a regional meeting which AC members are encouraged to attend. The AC role is both a visionary one and a decision-making one, particularly in relation to choosing grantees. Additionally, they are involved in:

- Outreach work promoting Safar fund in their country
- Development and research
- Administrative and legal support
- Choosing resources

- Partners network

The Partners network is comprised of organizations who share an interest with Safar in promoting a culture of initiative amongst youth in the Arab World and supporting youth in designing their own learning opportunities, pursuing their own learning paths and creating their own initiatives. Originally, this body was envisioned as a Partners Council with membership formalized through the submission of an application by any interested institution which would be approved by the Administrative Committee with the possibility that members of this group might eventually comprise the General Assembly.⁹ (See original proposal in Arabic). However, over time an informal, more flexible approach was seen to better meet the needs of Safar. The network is currently an informal one which functions on the basis of mutual interest without a formalized membership process.

Part of the original idea was that partner organizations could apply on behalf of selected participants (including staff/volunteers) to events/activities they organize or others organize. However, it quickly became clear that Safar was not designed to provide this kind of institutional grant and that partner organization grants was neither appropriate to Safar's vision and mandate nor feasible, given the way it has structured its grant selection process (interview with AEF regional director, 20/7/2007). The Administrative Committee therefore decided (July 22, 2006) that all applications would be reviewed on an individual basis even when put forward through a partner institution. Institutions are encouraged to submit applications for individuals they wish to host or who wish to travel.

The same selection process would be applied as to other applicants with two exceptions: 1) An institution or a group can submit a set of individual grants together if they are a group of youth who are organized together working on a specific initiative; and 2) The age range for those eligible is more flexible as consideration is made for older folks who might engage with youth in an initiative or learning process.

Encouraging applications through institutions contributes to the broader objective of the partners network to engage organizations in promoting a culture of youth initiative and supporting youth initiatives and young people's learning journeys whether through hosting young people in country or assisting those traveling out of country in making effective links with other young people and youth initiatives of interest.

- Youth network

Today each person who writes about one's experience and posts it on line, automatically becomes a member of Safar Friends in one's own country and a member of the Forum.

Some of these youth and some grantees are starting to organize into groups in order to go further in their various initiatives. In its typical style, AEF waits to learn from these initiatives before formalizing anything, if need be. However young initiators want to play a bigger role and often request more formalized mechanisms for engagement – a

⁹ This particularly idea seems to have fallen by the wayside as the emphasis has been on individual membership to the GA rather than membership through institutional affiliation.

challenge that Safar expects it will continue to engage with in a dynamic and responsive manner.

Is there a need to revisit this structure?

Discussion

During the Administrative committee meeting 26-28 July, 2007, AEF raised the issue of the legitimacy of the AC if it continues as it is, after this two-year period. Has the time come to widen the number of decision-makers in an effort to anticipate any loss of impetus which might occur when one stays too long in the same role? Again the preference given to movement was underlined, and the idea of a General Assembly was discussed as a mechanism to:

- Create a window to wider views, opinions, feedback.
- Elect the Administrative Committee.
- Approve plans and policies.
- Give youth right of ownership.
- Give right of participation to all Arab World countries.
- Open up learning process and co-motion [*ta'allum* and *hirak*].
- Ensure that Safar's beginnings as a large circle who delegated responsibility to a smaller group is honored ("we can't leave wider circle behind, we need to keep widening it").
- Evaluate Safar's progress.
- Broaden circle of commitment to Safar.

At the same time, some fears regarding a General Assembly were raised by the group:

- How do we keep the co-motion/movement [*hirak*] with the multiplication of people?
- How do we protect and build on the accumulation and continuity of experience and learning we've gained over two years as we broaden the circle?
- How do we transfer/spread the spirit of Safar?
- How do we maintain and build sense of belonging? collective development?

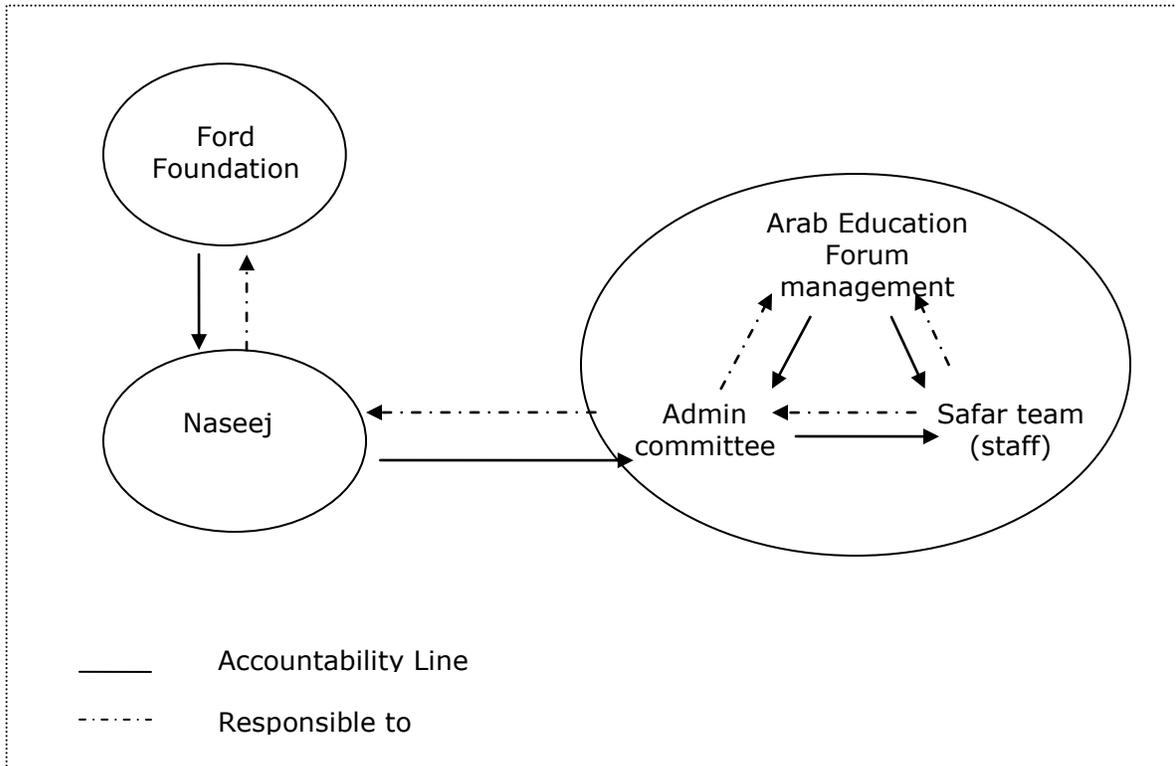
Several challenges emerged from discussions as is apparent in the lists above. A critical question informing the discussions was how Safar could maintain an open, inclusive and fluid process of engagement with young people allowing everyone interested to be part of the co-motion/movement while at the same time creating mechanisms for meaningful and effective participation in the decision making and actions that shape Safar.

For practical purposes the latter requires a smaller number which in turn presents the challenge of representation. AEF clearly struggles with the challenge of how to select who will engage in the process acknowledging that even if a larger group elects a smaller group to engage more intensively in decision making processes, somebody still has to select the larger group. AC members struggled with their fears that what they had worked so hard to build – a shared collective vision, the accumulation and continuity of learning and experience and a shared commitment to the continuation of this process and the remarkable level of trust in the process and one another that they had developed as a group – might be lost.

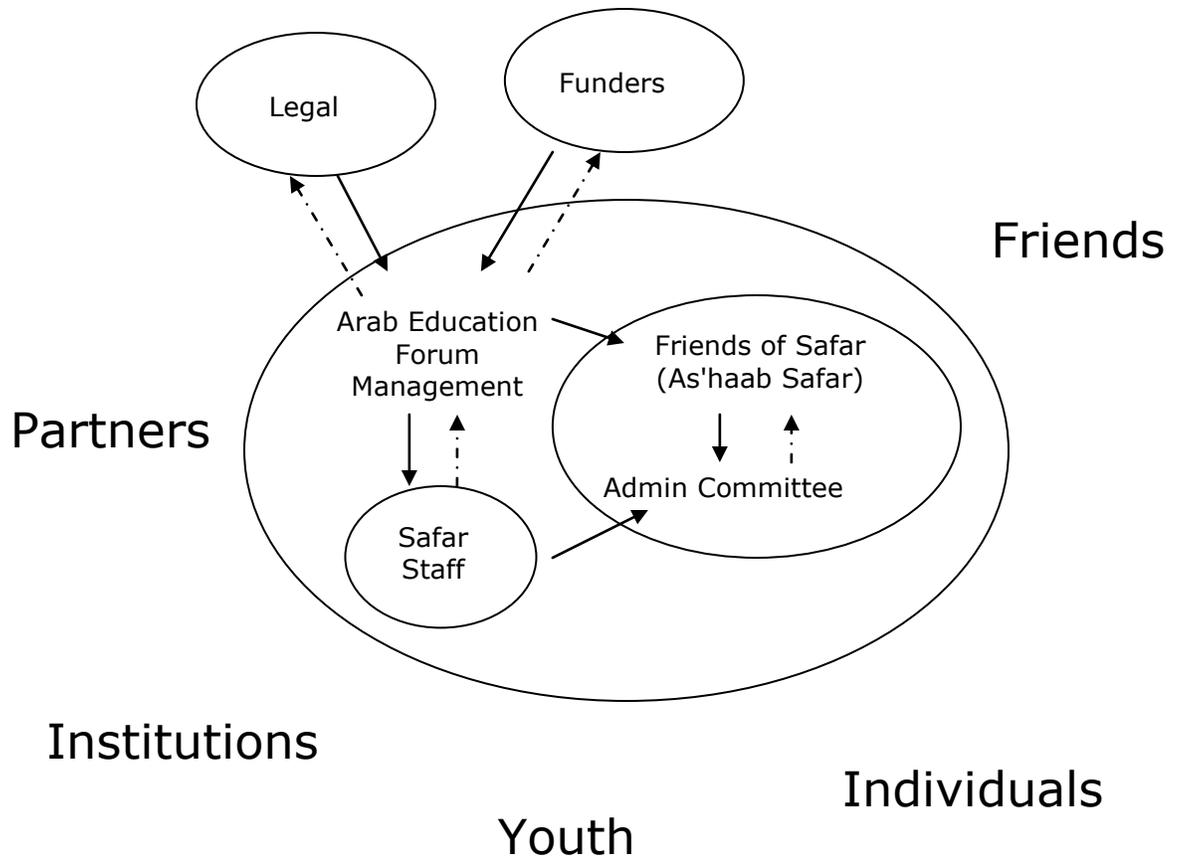
Through the discussion, AEF regional director worked with the group to develop and further adapt the concept of the General Assembly to better respond to the fears expressed and to what had been learned and accomplished through the Safar project since its inception.

Why not create a new body called *As-haab Safar*?

AEF believes that structures need to adapt to the project and not vice-versa. It believes that the decision-makers need to be as close to the implementation as possible, if not part of it. The chart below describes the current actors and their relationships to one another.



How can this existing structure evolve in order to widen the constituency, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of Safar from its constituency? The proposed new body will gradually expand to ensure representation of all Arab World countries. *As-haab Safar* will add a circle around the existing bodies thus creating a mechanism for ensuring that decisions are more strongly tied to contexts and communities targeted. *As-haab Safar* will provide a mechanism for greater accountability to Safar constituency.



——— Accountability Line
 - - - - - Responsible to

The chart above shows additional potential advantages such as the transfer and the sharing of experience to an expanding circle of learning.

AEF will keep monitoring the setting-up of this new circle of learning so that the collective vision and action is preserved. AEF will not be a member of As-haab Safar. However, AEF will participate in all of As-haab Safar meetings in order to fulfil its role in developing the learning process, contributing to consensus-building and protecting and contributing to developing the vision and principles of Safar as well as the vision of AEF as a whole which is constantly emerging from the experience that AEF projects accumulate in their direct interaction with the community.

It was agreed that it is not yet time for a General Assembly, a sign that Safar is becoming organizationally autonomous. As AEF Regional Director noted in meeting discussions: “Safar is an integral part of AEF; it complements and is complemented by AEF’s other projects and staff. There is no organic need for the time being for a separate institution”.

2. Resource mobilisation: fund raising and friend raising – What resources does Safar need to realise its aspirations?

This discussion focused almost solely on Safar's relationship with Naseej as AC members demanded a full explanation of why Naseej was questioning whether it might continue support to Safar, should Naseej receive Ford Foundation funding for a second phase. AEF staff members were asked to tell the "story" of the partnership and the evaluation team was asked to provide any insights into Naseej/SCF's concerns and criticisms.

During the discussion, concerns were raised about ensuring that funding needs not compromise Safar's vision, guiding principles and values and the approaches to its work which are viewed as integrally linked to these. The importance of learning processes over numbers was stressed. The question of whether the organizational cultures of AEF and Naseej/SCF were ultimately incompatible was discussed.

The initial reasons for the inclusion of the support for AEF to establish a youth mobility fund within the larger grant to Save for a community youth development fund from Ford Foundation were reviewed.¹⁰ The group felt that Naseej's approach toward Safar had been difficult for and unfair on the AEF Safar team.

The group again struggled with the challenge of how to better communicate what it does, and the results of what it does to its friends and partners. It was agreed that whatever direction the relationship might take in the future, Safar had to communicate a full picture to both Naseej/SCF and Ford Foundation of the Safar project -- conveying the excitement and inspiration emerging from the many achievements of the project that have resulted from both the process of Safar's development and the implementation of its activities, the challenges they have overcome and those they are still working to address and their confidence in its continued development in the future.

In this light, the group revisited how they might get better at communicating with partners and friends more broadly – sharing and celebrating Safar's success and mobilizing further support for and engagement in Safar's vision and movement / co-motion.

¹⁰ The grant was part of Ford Foundation Cairo Office's efforts to responsibly tie off its work in the field of community youth development. Originally, it was envisioned that support for the youth mobility fund would be a separate grant. However, AEF experienced delays in registering in Jordan and the time constraints faced by Ford as well as a strategic need to consolidate grant activity due to the closure of the community development portfolio, led to discussions and agreement with AEF and Save regarding including support for the mobility fund within the grant to Save. Lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the two organizations / programs emerged early on. While a number of discussions, including one involving the AC as well as AEF and Save, were thought to have clarified the relationship, the nature of the relationship continued to re-emerge as a point of contention, frustration and dissatisfaction for AEF and Save.

5. Concluding remarks from evaluators

AEF and the Safar Fund AC are coming successfully out of the first critical phase of developing a viable mechanism from the somewhat abstract concept of “movement” or “co-motion.” Why are we in the position of claiming such a result? The document review, the interviews with stakeholders, the participatory evaluation of the preliminary results we presented to the AEF and the AC, all allow us to say that the following fundamental steps have been achieved:

1. development of and adherence to clear criteria for selecting initiatives, thereby making the fund operational and gaining young people's confidence in the Fund's fairness and transparency
2. capacity to “move” from assumptions tinged with some dogmatic principles to pragmatic adaptation based on experiences with the feeling of building a stronger offer through learning rather than a sense of compromise or defeat
3. collective responsibility and ownership with AEF leadership
4. intellectual and emotional development and individual and collective inspiration derived from discussing concepts and exchanging experiences and turning these into directions for future action
5. AEF's coming to terms with the need for greater formalization of structures and procedures (acknowledgement that Safar does not exist in a vacuum but in a system with constraints).
6. quality in internal listening and feedback, counterbalancing the youth of the team and of the project
7. development of a real *regional* process reflecting regional diversity and regional dimensions rarely achieved in the Arab World despite numerous attempts

We therefore feel that the continuous process of “motion” / “co-motion” – (which to outsiders might sometimes look like instability) has contributed to sound foundations required for Safar to move from the current pilot phase into a full-fledged long-term project. As we see it, Safar, in its second phase, will have to deal with both an internal and an external journey. It will have to deal with the maturing of a staff team who will be careful to assume the role and “space” it is given so that the outside constraints do not impede any of the activities. It will have to deal with reaching out to Arab countries which haven't sent many initiatives to date, and to new constituencies, while consolidating emerging partners and youth networks.

During the Administrative Committee meeting 26-28 July, 2007, several major decisions were taken, which to us, as outside evaluators, proved the growing maturity of this group and gave us confidence that it will succeed in this second phase. Even if the “journey” is still at its start, we were struck by their capacity to anticipate challenges inherent to collective processes and group dynamics, like:

- anticipating the loss of impetus when a group doesn't open to new members to challenge the ongoing comfort of a well-oiled group
- looking for a greater legitimacy from the constituency by sharing the decision-

- making power with a larger group
- speaking out fears and facing the risk of conflicts
- emphasizing the search for diversity through a greater outreach effort geographically, socially, “inter-generationally” and to all domains

A major component of this second phase will indeed be the outreach to partner organizations who will provide young people with support in creating alternative learning opportunities (*tajawor* and *tazawor*). While partner organizations might continue to entertain an informal relationship, it was agreed that Safar will need to be more proactive in engaging current and new partner organizations. The AC proposed that meetings for institutions be organized along the lines of the existing regional meetings. Regional meetings bring together people with a diversity of ages, experiences and initiatives in a learning process based on the sharing and reflection of experiences with initiatives.

The decision to use a similar mechanism to strengthen relations with partner organizations was based on the clear success of regional meetings in providing an inter-generational forum for in-depth discussions and explorations around key Safar concepts like initiatives, inspiration, learning, etc. and providing the philosophical underpinnings, self-confidence, peer support and concrete examples to support their efforts to create and pursue their own "learning journeys." As for the young initiators, the website will play a central role for partner organisations in the information sharing and the linking. Partners need to see they are recognized as partners on the web. They will also look for a detailed and informative list of who the other partners are.

Another component of this second phase will be to translate the Safar vision into publicly comprehensible language. Whatever the actions, AEF hasn't managed to fully convey the impact of Safar. AEF has to get better at showing results to help those who support it and to effectively capture what difference Safar makes to the youth it is reaching. The challenge will be to set criteria on how to measure the success of “moving” youth, which is understood differently from “changing” them per se. The first regional meeting held in Cairo in July 2006, illustrates the liveliness of the exchange on this concept.

“The discussion regarding the results of group work focused on the concept of “change” versus “movement” or “motion”, and whether there is in fact a difference between them, and how it relates to what Safar is trying to achieve. AbdulSalam said that he has “heard a new term from the group and that is that an initiative is an action, a movement, and not change. Does Safar aim at achieving change? I think it moves things within us.” Suha asked the question: “Why is movement better than change?” and Serene expressed her opinion that “what’s important is to have movement, motion, we do not aim to change the direction that youth have chosen to take, what is important is to guarantee this constant motion and movement for youth. The problem is not in the term “change” in and of itself, but rather in the ideological meaning that it has acquired over the years connected to the attempt of one side to change the other based on the assumption that the former knows what is best for the latter. This reflects an inherent value that we are trying to avoid, therefore we prefer to use the term “movement” or “motion” (Hirak or Haraka) rather than “change”. AbdulAzim followed up on these comments by adding that the term

"change" has a subject and object of change and this in itself is problematic. AbdulSalam added that change is like education [taghyeer and ta3leem], while learning [ta3allom] builds on what exists, therefore Safar is more about "movement" than "change", like it is more about "learning" than "teaching". Mohammad Siraj chose to differ by asserting that "Safar changes our mentality and culture and encourages visits and tazawor between the Arab countries, so it contributes to change."

In these concluding remarks, we cannot but come back to the aim of the Safar project, i.e. to promote a culture of initiatives and a community of learners in dynamic interaction. Building itself around what youth are and what they can initiate rather than their adequacy to a pre-defined profile to which they will have to conform, reflecting a positive image to youth by trusting that they will use the opportunity to the best of their capacity, AEF has not chosen the easy route, nor a straightforward one.

It has chosen to give back their power of action to those willing to take the risk. It has chosen to value the individual and the process which puts her/him in the position of initiative and responsibility. AEF manages the Safar fund without imposing its knowledge on the grantees. How can we not link AEF approach to this old dream we all have of a society where each individual finds his/her own place, where everyone's potential is let to bloom in its own time? Shortcomings at the beginning are to be expected but AEF has demonstrated the ability to turn these into strengths through its commitment to ongoing learning. The road is still long and as Reid Cooper wrote it in one of his poems¹¹, "Even Ibn Battuta, if here, would agree that detours sometimes reveal just where you long to be."

¹¹ "Advice to an adventurer"